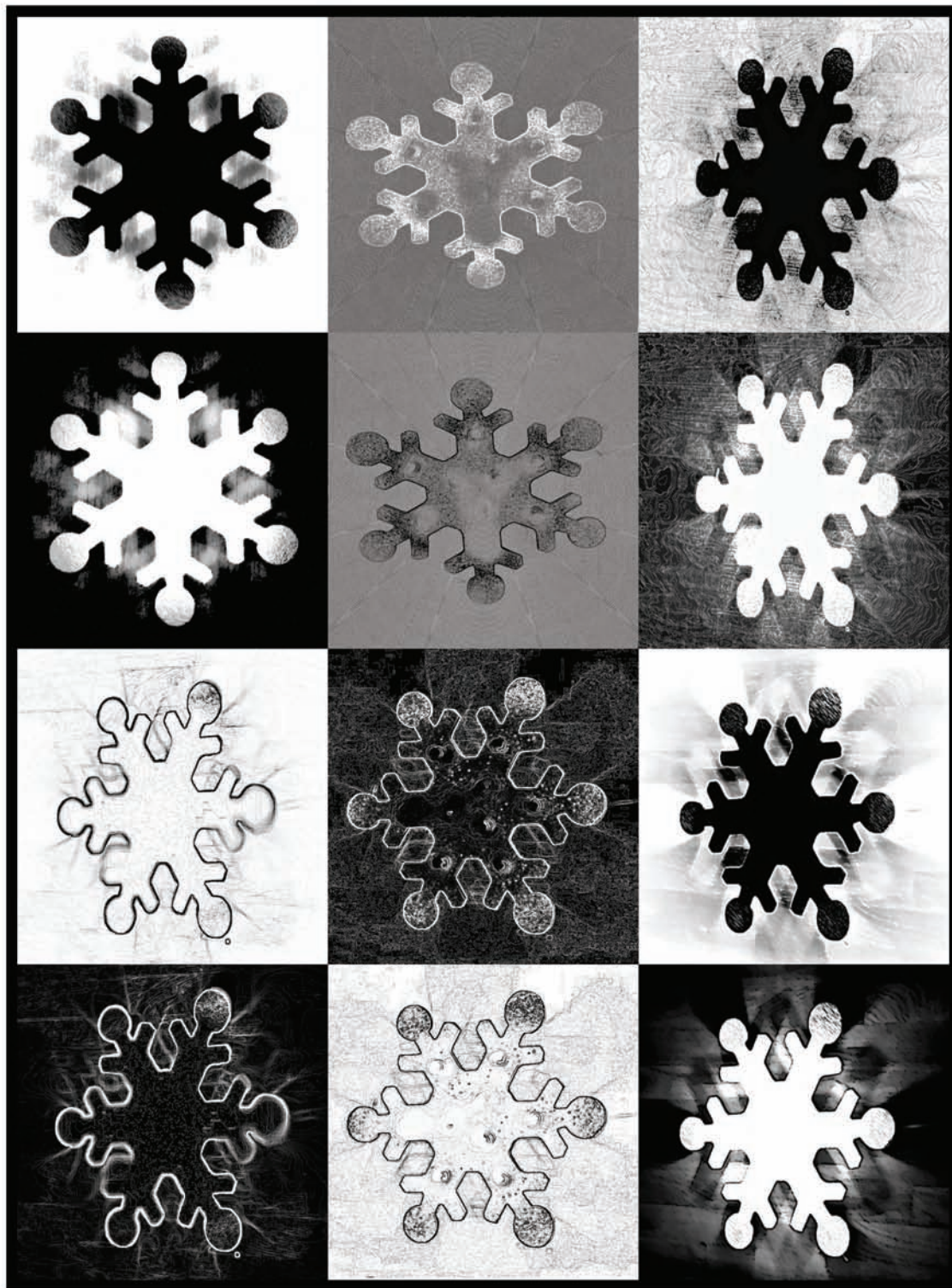
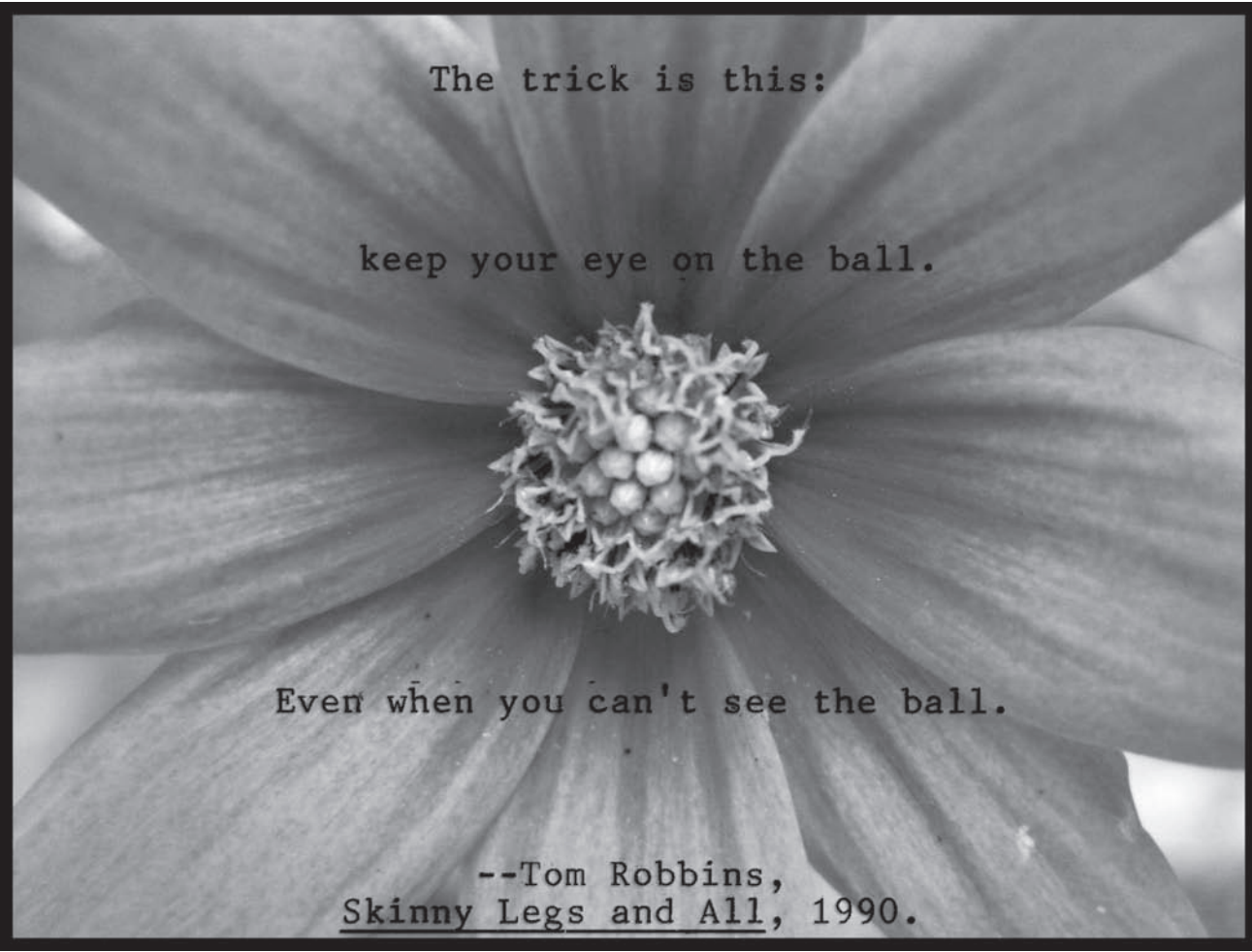


The Cenacle



NUMBER 91 • DECEMBER 2014

A black and white photograph of a flower, likely a gerbera, with a large, textured center. The petals are broad and spread out, creating a star-like shape. The center of the flower is a dense cluster of small, rounded structures, possibly stamens or developing seeds, which are the focus of the text overlay.

The trick is this:

keep your eye on the ball.

Even when you can't see the ball.

--Tom Robbins,
Skinny Legs and All, 1990.

December 22, 2014
8:20 a.m.
On board Oak Grove-
to-Downtown Crossing
Orange Line (T)

— Just begun a several day trip from Boston down to central Connecticut. Local rapid transit now to South Station bus terminal, Grayhound buses the rest of the way. 2 1/2 hours of them.

I'm from the areas I'm bound for; lived there till I was 28, & again for a year when I was near 40. I was made there all those years, made & re-made, until I left, & the making process continued elsewhere.

But nowhere in the making & re-making process is there un-making. A person is from, the get-go animate clay, changing, perhaps evolving, but the results over time are cumulative. My friend Jim Burke III put it best when he said, "We are what we were - but not what we shall become!" Yes, & maybe. I'm still working on the latter part of that assessment.

So, anyway, begun this trip. Why to come next.



9:20 a.m.
South Station
bus terminal-
tables
Boston, MA.

- This tall transportation building for buses sits next to the train station. Years back, long distance bus lines like Greyhound & Peter Pan were scattered at distinct ~~and~~ locations blocks from here (in different directions). They were smaller, more distinct. The Peter Pan station had lockers the homeless would use, & a newsstand with an amazing rack of paperback books. Classic authors like Hawthorne & Melville mixed in with the usual crap best-sellers of the day.

From '92 to '02, my first run of years living in Boston, I'd pass through this station nearly monthly, very often bound south for Hartford for meetings of the Jelliffe Literary Guild. A way point to see my old friends, share Art, catch up on news, raise up a drunken roar in the back room of Roma Restaurant.

I've loaded my beloved iPod Polly with Harry Chapin & Billy Joel albums, the music of my strange late adolescence. Melancholy

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music, sometimes sweet, sometimes funny,
stories of the human struggle. Good rock &
roll.

But why this trip? I'm not going down
to see anyone. There are very few still down
there that I know, yet partly about the
people that mattered to me nonetheless.

My mother died in March this year.
She was old, & sick, & sad. In early June
Kassi & I went down again, to help my
sister & her husband & a few others to
clean out her house, where I'd lived out
most of that strange adolescence.

The trip down for her funeral was
just plain sad. The trip down to clean
out her house was — I don't know the word.
A sort of bizarre trip back in time, a large
awakening. Someone else now owns that
house, has probably scraped out its insides
of years of decay, & unnecessary suffering,
burned out most of its tangled specters.

So, six months later. Gomp to stay at
a hotel in New Britain, where I went
to college, where I lived for years after
leaving my mother's home. There's really
nowhere else for me to stay down there.
Time has passed.

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Thrip is still struggling to say why clearly, I'm going to visit wherefrom I originate, & this is more than the people I knew. It's the places I would write, mostly, & others like movie theaters, bookstores, parks, record shops, fast food joints, to a lesser degree. The streets, the buses, the town centers, libraries, schools, & so on. It's whatever mattered, what I cared for. What hurt, what saved.

So it's a trip about this, bringing my present moment, once again through these deeply familiar places, these places of nearly wordless emotional resonance. What do we feel like, what do we sniff like, to each other now?

I have much Cenacle work to do while there, this writing, much editing, much typing. I'm bringing the best of my present person with me, its vital work.

I hope it feels good to be there. A little strange, yes, a little sad. Very familiar, but moved here & there (time passes). But good. Continuing energy, relation. Still touching, still wishing to know.

-28-

11:40 a.m.
On board
Boston, MA - to -
Hartford, CT
Peter Pan bus

"Captain Jack will get you high tonight -
& take you to your special island.
Captain Jack will get you by tonight -
just a little push, & you'll be smiling."
Billy Joel, "Captain Jack," 1972.

Boston to Hartford, via Framingham &
Worcester. The brilliant, barren, wild
woody travel down I-90. Wintery, New
Englandy, heavy low grey clouds, temp in
the 30s F.

Crowded highway, everyone rushing slow
as they always do near Christmas & New
Years.

Crowded bus. I'm near the back, got a
pair of seats to myself, maybe not for
long. Notebooks & Polly & my beloved MacBook
Pro & voice contained within my one seat,
just in case.

Good time to pause this & do a lot
of Cenacle work.

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2:08 p.m.
On board
Hartford, CT. to
New Britain, CT
Peter Pan bus

- Suddenly on the previous bus a thin, aged
grey man, was talking to me about audio
equipment - he saw me doing some audio
editing - his mind streamed past my brief
answers to lists of science-related words
& names: "Copernicus... Einstein... Carl Sagan
... Cosmos? Have you seen it? Now there's a
new one, dumbed down for the masses...
Venus... Jupiter... Pluto... it's not a planet.."
"Says who?" I ask.
"All the scientists. Planets are round. It's
not round."
"Oh."
"Planets can support life."
"Not all of them."
"Planets support life but not all do."
"That makes no sense."
"Yes, it does."
"No, it doesn't."
"You're wrong, sir. Highly ignorant."
"Fine. Whatever. Stop talking to me."
"OK."

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[Pause.]

"What's your name?"

[I say nothing.]

"I'm John - something - something."

[No reply by me.]

"You're terribly wrong, sir."

"Fine. Whatever. Peace."

"Peace."

[Gets up to depart bus]

"Quite wrong, sir."

Another passenger says to me, "Sorry you had to deal with that." I say back, "Thanks. He was funny till he got rude."

4:21 p.m.
Capitol Lunch
favorite table
New Britain, CT.

— Two burgers with special sauce, ketchup, mustard & cheese, onion rings, diet Coke. This cafeteria has been around for decades, still going long after most things in New Britain. New to me this time are the old timey black & white framed photographs of NB's fountain - long ago movie theatres & crowded blocks of shops. Cars of various decades.

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Still the wooden tables here, the red plastic chairs. The counter at the back where the ordering starts to the right, & you watch your food pass from hand to hand until ready & there's the cash register.

When I lived just blocks from here in the '80s & early '90s, summertimes especially I'd spend hot summer days here. Writing, reading books or the Sunday NY Times. Makes me happy that long long after I moved away, I still come here when I can, still the same tasty food, still write. This time spent reading the current unfinished Boys End News story.

I feel those other years when I come here, but I'm still me, now. Staying at a nearby hotel, living 200 miles away.

But rarely, I came here alone, ordered my food from the friendly staff, but otherwise a solitary experience. I suppose that's true of many places I would tend to come to down here when visiting.

It's like I've lived two lives, in a sense. Or two halves. One in places like this, alone, doing my work. The other with the loved ones I've known over the years.

I think time to move on.

-32-

6:42 p.m.
Peoples Donutshop -
favourite table
New Britain, CT.

- Of all the places I wrote at ~~in~~ in
those past years, this joint was always
one of my favorites, & it remains still,
& open, ~~still~~ as it was.

Actually a Dunkin' Donuts, a mostly
East Coast U.S. chain, my nick name for
it comes from the varieties of kinds of
people who pass through it. From the home-
less to professors from the local college,
all sorts.

Fairly big place, tall windows, good view
of the great big sky visible over New
Britain's fairly low skyline.

I started coming here around 1988, &
I still have from those days my big plastic,
orange-lidded Dunkin' Donuts soda cup. They
don't sell fountain soda, but I bring it
anyway to every DD I go to.

Came here in the summers for the
air conditioning (usually after Capitol
lunch). Came to be anonymously & maybe
anamolously among the lotto ticket
players, off-track betters, local workers,

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occasional book-readers, & soon. Habit of coming to places like this because my ~~the~~ house growing up too small, too full of people. Because my high school was a mortar-&brick indignity that caused me find places to hide, where I busied myself writing up the new better worlds I wished for me & all.

A few times brought my bookish friends here to have literary meetings. Once met up with a girlfriend here; my habit of frequenting places like this with my notebooks & pens was one of many things she learned she didn't like about me.

It doesn't feel any different than other times, being here tonight. I'm happy here, typing earlier, writing now. If I wanted sad, if, I'd have to go to where I laughed & cried with people I loved, now gone. That family house now owned by someone else. My deceased friend Jim's old place. Or favorite writing joints of mine long gone.

No: places I associate primarily with writing & good hours of solitude are not going to turn bad for me simply because I no longer have close loved ones in central Connecticut.

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Have to leave for now, need to keep typing at Cenacle, & this place does not have outlets for me to use. Will be back later tonight or tomorrow.

December 23, 2014

Noontime

La Quinta Inn-Rm 223 [desk]
New Britain, CT.

- Worked on Cenacle till late, & still so much more to go. I guess it got the better of me. It did get the better of me. I was up way too late, exhausted, stressed, unsleeping.

Finally slept & a weird dream of a tiny metal shaft inserted into my skull, sucking out my mind -

Finally I got up, dragged me into the shower to put on a clean day, dressed, picked up room, put on Miles Davis - Kind of Blue now, Bitches Brew next - sat down at this desk-table, & here I am. Drunk my juice to leave the show too.

One useful thought: this is not the only time I will do this; it's the first. It's also the next, stretching back all the years we come down here.

There's a beautiful, bare white birch

-35-

out my window; beyond it a boarded-up building, I believe the old New Britain Herald building. Grey winter day. Stillness but squirrels.

Right now I've a lot of typing to do. Then I'm going to catch the local bus to Hartford, where less of my past is still around. I'll do with it what I can this time.

Half buried in the ground.
Half above in the shine.
Swimming slowed by memory.
Wishes a breeze on fingertips.

6:40 p.m.
Peoples Donutshop -
my table
New Britain, CT.

- I was in that hotel room till about an hour ago, when I went out to touch the triple trunks of that white birch.

I'd spent the afternoon thinking about the past, it's liquid always, it burns, it saves. When I left room, I came here, my old refuge again.

I've been feeling sad about Connecticut for so long, I think I came



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looking for the sweet. For those days & hours, back when, when I wasn't too poor, wasn't too lonely, wasn't too worried about someone or something, or likely more than one of each.

But there were hours when I just lost myself in my work. Pens & notebooks. Maybe a rock tape on my Walkman, if I had one, if it had batteries. I'd switch them out till deader than dead.

So be here but not be sad. Wanting, regretful, confused. Once in awhile, my skin cohered awhile & I shone. And I shared it, all I could. If me, then you! Then why not anyone?

I still believe that, now, tonight, sitting here, years beyond those years, yet today feeling them close again, letting myself feel them close again.

I believe we suffer needlessly this life, lonely hours & wanting, hungry, wasteful, uncertain.

I believe this world was given gift to all that dwell upon it & men are only exalted when they are humbled & delighted to the natural

37-
bounty of this blue-green planet, its
infinite wealth, its miracle.

Seeks you Godd, just look around.

The world shrank down upon me,
a room full of my old, sad memories,
& for awhile this vision of the world
held.

But that triple white birch through
the frothy window. A dull, grey, early
winter, damp day & yet it shone.

I remember an old line: where there's life,
there's hope. And: survive. endure. bloom.

Tonight, I'm writing for my life as
I always do, alive, alive in this old
refuge of mine, big pile of editing
work waiting me too.

Thank you Universe, for letting me
suffer through these sad old
remembered hours, & on past
them, awhile. Arrive to myself, &
breathe, & relax. Enough, for now.

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9:25 p.m.

-The mercy of hard, focused work, floundering with the pages of words, mine, not mine, the strange skin each issue becomes, I become we too are one we too are one-

This is a hard-fought-to-good night—
gift—

* Mary Musics

* Levi's Genes

* Tom Sheehan poetry

* Judith Hama poetry

* F. Fitzgerald's "Babylon, Rev."

* Bayer "Paleo Red."

* Coleman poetry

* Labyrinthine

* Notes from New England

* John Marks essay

11:20 p.m.

—List is not all checked off, but it will be by when these notes are scanned & eventually published.

I think I've spent myself good, finally. I think I want to go to bed & call this long, long day good.

The local chubby bearded homeless guy here, watching AC/DC rock on his tiny device, thinks I go to the local college. I did, tho not since 1989.

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December 24, 2014

9:30 a.m.

La Quinta Inn - Rm 223
New Britain, CT [Desk]

-Packed, about to walk the ten min or less to the downtown, wait for first of two buses to bring me back to Boston, then local trains home.

It was an intense two days. I worked hard, in a variety of ways. Coming here alone, I found myself confronting the remaining potency of my gone days living here. The people come & now mostly gone. Family. Jim. Girls I loved. The person I was & now he has broken up & re-assembled, time & again. It was very emotional but it was OK, especially last night when the homeless folk at the donutshop wished me happy holidays, on my way, told me to study hard!

The white birch outside this window is porgeous, gully itself within, & among everything else. I think we people folk struggle with that all the time.

So I struggled. So it's time to go.
12/24/2014 New Britain, CT.

1:31 p.m.
Chinatown (T) station
Boston, MA.

Postscript - Misty, peaceful ride back to Boston, writing & editing, listening to the most peaceful piano music I had on hand.

Arrived South Station. People always want snow on Christmas Day, feel cheated if it does not come. It's OK one way or another by what comes.

[now on Chinatown-to-Oak Grove orangeline (T)]

-Walking through the crooked, crowded streets of Chinatown, Asian shops of every kind piled high, snaking with my bags among occasional hoards of travelers, a casino bus awaiting some, looking up at the various tall buildings in the distance wearing misty chapeaus, dodging the traffic of a regular day, making my way slowly along to the train station, I felt, & I feel on this train now, a great gratefulness to be back here. To call this metropolis, above all I have lived in, home.

Even if hereon I bring my best new work & still-forming ideas down to Connecticut, bring others to see where I come from, even look

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up once in a while, the few remaining loved ones I still vaguely know there, traveling there will be mostly about the past. It's been that way increasingly as time has passed, & little likely will change this.

I go to the old, familiar places, in part because I rarely see new ones, but also because I did not seek them out. I go to these places because... I love them, I wish to visit them as old friends. They are mostly what remains, yet their pull is real, & the pleasure I felt at them real as well.

So to accept this weird half-assed time machine idea. Some go to Renaissance Faires to see that world re-created, sort of. Others like to keep moving, keep the past in their rearview mirrors, safe at a distance.

I coax what I can of my past to remain with me, tend it in my heart, & these occasional trips. Sometimes what appears out of the dark is sad, unpleasant, unresolved, never to be resolved. But sometimes the moment blurs, I'm here then/now, the timeline back bursts into something else, something new/old is made.

And sometime a white birch reminds me of other things than me, & I am glad.

Q&A 2/24/2014

The Cenacle

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Thankee to the sometime denizens of the Peoples Donutshop in New Britain, Connecticut. On a recent night when I wrangled with my mortal history, ye several were simply kind & smiling to me. Me, the “student” among ye, studying for his tests, trying to solve the deficit, whatever else seemed sensible. I will be back. . . .



Charlie Beyer



Paleo Redemption

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 90 | October 2014

17 - Ridge Run

I charge off up the hill as the women relax in the sun. They are not too fanatic about finding bones, I think. More about getting a good tan before ski season. A man is much more driven to attain success. A woman is successful already with her beauty, her entitlement, her casual way. Us stupid men must claw and tussle for every scrap of advancement. And it's never enough.

But then, why is my sister here at all? She says she wants to increase her knowledge of paleontology, but she never reads anything about it, never talks about it. As far as I can tell, she is illiterate. Obviously she can't read price tags, but she spends most of her days at home surfing the Internet for the latest in fashion.

It is this crowd of sons she can't stand to be without. Dan the top paleo botanist. Dave the struggling paleo wannabe. JonJon the dinosaur expert, who she calls her adopted son. She is the quintessential den mother. The emotional support for these giant men. She wants to be central to the paleo pack, even if she can't tell the Cretaceous from the Cenozoic.

She has always tried to keep her boys home . . . close. Never encouraged them to leave home. It is surprising they left home at all. Maybe it was out of technical necessity, the septic system being overwhelmed. But, more likely, it was Dad. Dad who could not go against never-empty-nest mother, but plotted his own stratagem of charging them rent and beleaguering them with work tasks they hated. They had to get the hell out of the house, or work for Fussbudget Father in his overly complicated and irrelevant construction business.

I reach the ridge top and am agog at yet another massive view of dozens of miles in all directions. Below me on the other side is another vast valley, a mile wide on the bottom, a hundred earthy colors of yellow, red, and green mud, hoodoos every where, gullies and slopes that look like it would take a hundred years to inspect. Awesome is too tame a word. I walk the ridge for a half-mile, trying to spot the experts and assorted volunteers who could keep up with them. I can see no one in the miles below. This great landscape has swallowed them.

What difference would it make anyway? What simian compulsion is it to make me want to connect? What is the monkey obsession with connection, connection, *always connection*? If we were the descendants of cats, we would not have the slightest inkling to associate with our own kind. Except to screw them or kill them. Our monkey chatter would be disdained by our proud aloof silence. We would think nothing of slaughtering someone on the way home from work, nor would it be a crime.

As much as I believe this would be a proper way to conduct myself, I cannot shake the longing for monkey company. Someone to whine to at day's end. Someone to pick the fleas

off me.

Ted strikes me as feline though. Definitely something aloof about him. He must certainly have fleas.

Were the dinosaurs cold killers to each other, or did they like to sleep in a pile, softly snoring into each other's belly fur?

I return back along the ridge, mostly along the route I came by, making small detours, zig-zagging along the hundred foot top so as to not miss anything obvious. I do not see a fleck of bone. Too high up. Out of the stratas, although there is really no rhyme or reason as to where something can be found. In an hour I am back where I started, directly above my sister and the animal. They are both still sprawled out, soaking up the sun. The bad back girl continues to scratch in the dirt.

"Hey, Lauri," I shout down from the ridge. "Can you hear me?" She languidly cocks her head and scans the air above her.

"Yeah?"

"Are you coming up?"

"What?"

"Up. Are you coming up?"

"No. Winnie is not moving." *Worthless excuse for a dog*, I think.

"Whatcha doing down there? Find anything?"

"We found some turtle shell pieces. A little bit." *A little bit of work*, I reckon.

"I'm staying up here."

"Ok. Whatever."

"What time you got?" I call down.

"What?"

"Time. What time is it down there?" As if it would be a different time three hundred feet above her.

"Bout four thirty"

"What's dirty?"

"Four. Four o'clock."

"OK, then. I'll be down in an hour."

"Fine." She answers. The sort of *fine* that sounds like *you are a pimple in my life*. The kind where a woman icily answers to a mild argument about directions, after finally giving up trying to convince the man of the proper way. What did I do to receive this cool treatment? Is she annoyed at the implied obligation to haul the fucking dog up the hill and get on with fossil hunting? *Fuck her. Fuck the dog.*

I'm pissed. The day is blown. Blown by the dog who has been dragging ass all morning. Slowing us down to even get to this worthless spot. Now there is no hope to jump over the far side and locate some bone monster. I am scowling. Black thoughts of inept humanity course through me. Nobody does what the hell they say they will do. Everyone seems to have some secret agenda that is in conflict with my pure and lofty ideals. Why must I always be dragged down to the lowest common denominator? *Why can't someone—sometime—rise up to meet or exceed what I have in mind?* That would be a refreshing switch of reality. Someone with greater ambition than myself. The hell with idiots. I'll not compromise tomorrow. No more lollygagging. Tomorrow I strike out on my own. Find the tyrannosaurs. Screw the inept. Let them live their lives of mediocrity.

I wander the ridge in the other direction. No distinctive bone fragments. Lots of thirty-foot hoodoos that I skirt around, these massive pedestals seeming so much larger than when viewed in silhouette from a distance. At one spot I think I find egg fragments, but am not sure if they are calcium carbonate flakes that have weathered off a rock. So insignificant. In disgust, I crumble them to dust between my fingers. If they are real, nobody's going to find them now. I pout. I sit in the soft sand for a long time, playing with its texture, slowly cooling down. It is so peaceful, so comfortable. *What is all the mental fuss about?* I wonder. From the viewpoint of space, I am no more than one of these specks. Less than insignificant. My thoughts less than that. Ethereal stupidity meaning nothing. Coming from nothing and going there all at once. No point in any of it. Just feel the warm sand and live in the Buddhist moment. Eventually I rise and work my way down the slope to where the girls have been Zenning out all day. I am relaxed now. Calm and friendly. I sit with them and inspect the crummy fragments they have collected. In a lazy slow way, we collect our belongings and head back to camp. The dog senses that we are returning to food and sleep. Rallies itself for the trek home. It seems to like its new shoes, walking almost briskly.

18 - Camp Evening

Back in camp, the sun low in the sky, the colors of the canyon glowing red and orange in the long light. Others are drifting in from the field, dusty but grinning with their minor accomplishments. Dave found a half hadrosaur jaw imbedded in rock. JonJon a scattered crocodile without the necessary bones or skull, just pocketfuls of skin. The others nothing worth mentioning or worth carting out. I collect wood again for the night's fire, again alone, the dogs too spent to accompany me. The others drink beer. Kitty and Dan set to work on a fried meat dinner. The twenty-somethings are peeling off their hiking shoes and inspecting their damaged feet. The shoes are fancy with names like Solomon Quest GTX and North Face Hedgehog IV, which cost in the \$200-300 range. I am surprised at the plethora of raw skin and blisters. I had thought that such prices guaranteed an airy walk, like wearing marshmallows. One poor bastard has his big toe nails ripped off from snagging inside the shoe when going downhill. That's got to hurt mightily. My feet are fine—not that I walked any vast amount—the cheap Chinese tennis shoes tearing themselves apart rather than my feet. To their credit, the twenty-somethings take their pain quietly, emitting only a few groans as they inspect the wreckage.

Dinner done, the fire built up to an incinerating blaze, new whiskey bottles emerge. The expensive shoe kids continue to bandage their feet. Feeling warm all over from the whiskey, the mood mostly quiet, I tell the story of a young Basque. The kid was new to the field, having been sent out with the old



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

veterans by his parents to earn the trade. Sheep herding. He wandered the vast wastelands of Nevada with them for some weeks, learning how to shave and castrate the animals. One evening, the child, being clumsy, tripped and fell into the fire. There he writhed in agony for a minute or more on the hot coals until he was dragged out by the elders. He was badly burned over all of his back and chest. Knowing that they were a hundred miles from the nearest dirt road, medical help was impossible. By chance, a sheep had just been skinned before dinner. Not knowing what to do with the howling boy, they wrapped him in the sheep skin, meat side in. This comforted his suffering, and all that remained was to wait and see. In some days, the boy recovered. When trying to remove the skin a few weeks later, it was found that the skin had “took.” The furry boy returned to work by month’s end, and now the Basques get a bushel of wool off him every year.

A great quietude lies over the campfire. Some of the elders chuckle lightly, but the twenties are not sure if it is true or not. Finally, Kitty chimes in.

“This is preposterous. The immune system would reject the skin.”

“But it did happen,” I say.

“I’ve never heard of anything like it.”

“Maybe Princeton doesn’t know everything.”

“They know enough. Was the kid an outcast for the rest of his life?”

“Oh no. He integrated quite well into his society. Never had to wear a coat in winter. Out in the lonely West, who is there to criticize?”

“Didn’t he get fleas or have complications?”

“The kid is quoted as saying, ‘It’s not so *baaaaaaaad*.’” Now the youths realize they have been strung along. To augment the conversation, I start up a new tack.

“I’ve heard that the Chinese reattach the amputated arms of factory workers.”

“Yes, this is true.” Kitty remarks in all seriousness.

“And that some of the workers have increased production by having an extra arm, or even two more attached,” I further state.

“Now *that*. That is bullshit.”

“You must have plenty of Frankenstein opportunities in your autopsy lab?” I query.

“I teach physiology to medical students.”

“Is that like corpse desecration?” Lauri asks, wide-eyed.

“It’s called dissection. Yes, we cut ’em open and examine all the parts.”

“*Ewww*. Ya mean real people? Isn’t it stinky?” Lauri exclaims.

“Yes, we do hit a gas pocket from time to time. Particularly when cutting through the peritoneum and removing the lower intestine.”

“Don’t the students barf and flee in horror?” asks Dan.

“Yes. Some do. Some have to leave the room. But if they don’t come right back, I flunk them.”

“I hear that some corpses sit upright when sliced into. Is that true?” I ask.

“Yes. There are a number of muscle contractions during dissection. The most common of which is the hand gripping. Sometime the hands grip the clothing of the medical students.” She has an evil crooked smile now. This princess of the dead is getting into her stride.

“Bet they shit their pants! *Hunkk hunna*.” adds in Dave. Kitty ignores this scatological comment and continues on.

“I like to cut their flexor tendons before handing the body over to the students.

Especially the fresh ones. This cuts back on accidental grabbing.”

“What is the most difficult part of the job?” asks Dan.

“I would suppose it’s examining the pancreas. A long cut must be made from the navel to just above the heart, the lungs removed, and access gained by sawing out a few ribs and reaching under the sternum to get at it. My favorite job is removing the livers. So much can be told about a person’s lifestyle by the condition of the liver. If he or she was a hard drinker, what drugs he or she took, even if he or she was a happy person or not. Nothing is nicer than a healthy soft brown liver.”

Oh my god. This lady is a hepatic necrophiliac. I’ve never heard of anyone so lovingly fondling a liver.

“What about heart failure? Can you tell that?” asks my sister who is somewhat obsessed with the subject since Dad checked out with rock-hard arteries.

“Ooh yes. The heart is one of the most fascinating parts of the job. Prying open the rib cage is the hardest part because, if you are not careful, it can snap back and trap your hand. But I like to use a piece of wood to wedge . . .” And on and on she goes. Removing bile with a rubber hose like stealing gas. Proper kidney removal. More details about prying the dead open with a two-by-four. Necrophiliac Vamprilla. Her eyes glow red in the campfire. Her front incisors seem to have each grown a half an inch longer. Her gray hands stroke her knees where she wants a corpse to be. With each new dissertation some other asshole asks another question that begins a new autopsy procedure. The necrophilia is making me nauseous. My liver is starting to hurt. I can’t take all this bodily gore any more and excuse myself to go hide in my tent. I flunk, and I’m proud of it. Hope she shuts up before breakfast.

19 - Freedom in the Layers of Time

I awake before the sun breaks the horizon, as is my custom. It is fearsome cold. Even when the sun does come up, it will take another hour before it can struggle over the hoodoos to shine down into this valley. Into the kitchen camp area, it is again the carnage of a teenage party—garbage strewn, shoes and assorted clothing in the dirt. I get the fire going again. This I like to do, and the heat is comforting. The coffee situation is absolutely geologic. The roasted lamination in the French press is frozen, adding to excavation complication. The water jug, the peanut butter, even the mayonnaise is frozen. In a short while, because I’m moving fast in proportion to the lack of heat, I get some coffee made, trash burned, and a square foot cleared on the kitchen table. Build the fire up a little, noting that the selfish have immolated most of the wood—*again*. The first cup is like nectar, warming the insides, brightening the day.

But this is no time to dally. This is the time to escape alone into the vastness. I quickly pack a lunch of meaty sandwiches and a large amount of Triscuits. Today I am first on the tool pile, so reject the puny rock hammer in favor of one of the nice lightweight Estwing picks. Today I will be the scaler of cliffs.

Without further ado, I depart unencumbered by the waddling dog and the dawdling sister. I feel the freedom under my light and quick step, joyously covering the terrain as a master. Within 15 minutes I am up on the first bench above, a chore that took hours yesterday. Taking a more northerly route—which requires ascending a steeper and larger slope to attain the ridge—I get to use the technique of my nephew, sinking the pick into the near vertical wall and hauling myself up with its assistance. It is a little spooky and wild, being able to look



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

between your knees to the hundreds of feet below, but I like it. The danger. The skill. The balance. The stories of the human fly that slosh about in my mind. Soon I reach the ridge, the unexplored vastness before me. The sun now wrapping me in its warmth.

Seeing a hog back ridge connecting this to the valley floor ahead, I begin my descent. I feel as though an explorer on the moon, the land so weird, so barren of vegetation, so uninhabited or untraversed since the beginning of time. Most of the way down, I come across some really big bones, broken but big. I spend some time here excavating a hole but can find no more of the fella, whoever he was. There is a strange carbon shape in the hill that I dig around also. Unidentifiable, odd overall. After a spell I wander on, down through valleys, over flat open layers, investigating green layers with misinterpreting intensity. Some areas are littered like the county fair parking lot, only

with bone fragments. Paleo garbage. Other places are barren. I see no one as I wind around in the kaleidoscope of land. I love it. *Freedom. Wildness. The warm sun and earth. The surprise that is just around the next mud hill.*

At one point, I find shells. Lots of them. An acre of clams. Not the fast fish fry kind, but large elongated things, mussels on steroids. I find the source, huge slabs of rock festooned into a conglomerate of shells. Many have eroded out into perfect casts, fitting perfectly, smoothly into the palm of my hand. But this source is not *the* source. These hardened slabs are broken off of a layer one hundred fifty feet up. To this I climb, but oddly it is not the cornucopia that I had hoped for. But up here now is the sun and gentle breeze, affording me a vast view up and down the valley. In the far distance, I see Dave swinging the massive pick, and negotiate my towards him. The monkey company thing again. What the hell is he up to? Found the tronny? A finned diplodocus?

I take my time, wandering the sinews of the carved earth. From where I am, there seems to be a white glob of possible bones in the distance that takes me on another tangent, then another, crossing gulches and clambering hills. In time, I reach Dave, who is now half buried in dirt, having cut a sizable trench to the top of a small ridge. There, squatted in shale and dirt, he sits beside a crocodile jaw that is rooted in the rock. I help him lovingly brush the dirt away from the teeth that stick up like a tiny picket fence. In my haste, I break off a tooth and am lightly scolded by my nephew. I hadn't realized the thing was so fragile. His quest is to find the rest of the animal, so I set to work with my pick, making new trenches, seeking the elusive bones. Sadly, not to be found. At the base of the hill there is a variety of fossilized crocodile skin. Crocodile skin is like a hexagonal sponge. Odd in all regards, apparently the underlying hard part of the skin. I secretly pocket a few fine specimens. I think this is really cool stuff. If I ever went to a wedding, which I don't intend to, particularly mine, I could be

the giver of something old. 66 million years old. A dumb rock. But not dumb to me.

Others congregate now, arriving from the lost crannies of the landscape. We all marvel at Dave's find that is mostly exposed now with his careful attention. The wind is kicking up and blowing the excavated dirt into our faces like a sandblaster. It is in our eyes and mouths, but we hardly mention it. I prefer this to rain or snow any day of the week.

At some point, Dan joins the party and levels instructions to preserve the specimen. We paint it with a liquid glue that saturates into and around the bone. It gives the jaw a brownish veneer, such as you see bones in a museum. But that is what we are doing, making museum specimens. Painted sufficiently, we apply thirty layers of toilet paper soaked in a light plaster, and a plaster cloth on top of that. They will come back at some point and saw this from the ground, repeating the process on any exposed bone on the bottom. Then the labor of packing it out, its weight increased five-fold.

The shadows are long now. The wind rises up to howling proportions. Dan says that it is time to head back to camp before darkness engulfs us out here, making it that much more confusing. We wander more or less together, some jabbering shoulder to shoulder, others like myself wandering wide on the side. We're all back at the main camp within an hour, energizing the fire while others dig dinner out of coolers. Dave helps me collect firewood tonight. The dogs swirl between all our feet, hoping to be part of the food preparation. Lauri hasn't wandered more than a quarter mile from camp, the fur runt protesting every step like a pubescent teenager. The twenties drink beer and swap test and study stories of their universities, still being so fresh in their minds. The bureaucrat busybody is strangely silent, possibly in pain along with the other shredded feet in the squad. I hope so. Her husband, the Lincoln look-alike, says nothing. Sits as silent as the memorial to him in Washington D.C. With his dusty clothes of tan designer jungle-wear, he appears carved out of cheap marble.

Following a meaty dinner of incinerated half chickens and beans, the group settles in around the fire. Presently a bottle of Irish whiskey is passed around. This is good stuff and I drink my share as it passes from lips to lips in the circle. Dave wants to talk about "Poopy Bob" who browned his trousers in the museum hallway. No one is particularly enamored with the discussion except himself, who guffaws loudly. The bad back babe is giving him the watery eye though—apparently a subject she likes, or maybe it's his manic energy about it. JonJon provokes him to make a bigger fool of himself.

"Think the beans will make you fart, Dave?"

"Diarrhea! *Hunckhnck*."

"Really, Dave, ya think your pants are safe?"

"*Hooh. Hunck haa. Diarrheaaaaa!*" louder now with his mantra word.

"When ya going back up to shit forest to look for more crap?"

"Trudville. *Hunck hunck. Diarrhea!*" expels Dave.

Dan, embarrassed about his brother, tries to change the subject.

"Hey, did you hear about that Mormon who was shot near here by the Ute Indians?"

"No. Not really. What about it?" responds JonJon

"Guess the Mormon was grave robbing a burial site. Had a fine pile of arrowheads too."

"What happened?"

"The Indian shot the guy in the back of the head. Took the time to re-bury the artifacts before the authorities came and took him away."

"Well, you guys have heard of Claude Dallas, haven't you?" I ask.

"He shot somebody too. Who was that?" asks Jonjon.

"He shot the law, and the law didn't win."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I had occasion once to sit next to one of the pigs who was in on the manhunt for him."

"OK. Go on."

"It happened that I caught the puddle jumper from Boise to Seattle on Crashcaid Airlines. These tiny turbo prop planes must clear the Cascade Mountain range to get to the coast. Many do not, and hence the name bastardization of Cascade Airlines. The seats are crammed in, and yet I felt mine was even more cramped, mashed as I was between the window and a gigantic sheriff. He had the proverbial flat top and arrogant pig air about him. Being bored and uncomfortable, particularly in the presence of the law, I engaged him in conversation.

"Well, officer, from what county do you prevail?"

"Owyhee County. Biggest damn county in Idaho. More wild country than the rest of the state combined."

"Are you out in the country a lot, then?"

"Damn right. There's no rock a criminal can hide under from the likes of me."

"Isn't that the county that Claude Dallas hid out in? What ever happened to that guy anyway?"

"Why that snake-eyed polecat. Son-of-a-bitch is out free in the country again."

"Free is he? How did that happen?"

"That's what the people wanted. Judge went along with it. Served his puny sentence and walked."

"Damn. You don't say."

"Travesty of justice, if you ask me. Should have shot him when we had the chance."

"I would have expected nothing less of this cowboy pig. But I wanted to butter him up, as I live in Owyhee County and am not partial to his pearl-handled six guns blazing down on me for some tiny infraction with explosives or some other minor issue."

I continue with the story in greater detail.

20 - Claude Dallas

Claude Dallas was from the Midwest. If television had been promoting the trench coat killer with the hidden shotgun under it meme when he was young, he would have been in the line-up at the Columbine school shooting. Claude loved guns in inverse proportion to his loathing of people. He had every kind of weapon and practiced with them furiously. He also studied trapping, both conventional ways and a hundred illegal ways, snares, wire traps, spikes, and pit falls. When he got out of high school, he packed up three duffel bags of guns and headed to the Wild West. He wore a fifteen-gallon hat, similar to Hoss in the old *Bonanza* show.

In the far lonely valleys of Nevada, he found employment with ranchers. As is practiced there, cows are released into the empty wasteland in the spring and rounded up a year or more later. Claude was the guy who would roam thousands of square miles in search of these animals. The snow painted him white, the sun bleached his leathery outfit, the loneliness and

silence of empty space sank into his soul. He became a valued wrangler to the owners of this vastness, never complaining, always ready to return to the nothingness. Self-sufficient in every way. He was seen as a true icon of the west, the lone wolf, and a competent collector of cows.

In a half a dozen years, he became well known among scattered locals in a superficial way, as he never spoke more than a few words. He was well liked by cafe and general store owners, paying in cash for a few supplies, and then heading back out to god knew where. For months at a time when not employed, he would disappear into the mountains, living off the game he caught there. In the winter of 1981, Claude was camped on the upper reaches of the Owyhee River in a wilderness area. Two fish and game officers got a tip that he was poaching deer and set out to arrest him. Hiking down three miles into the deep canyon, they came unexpectedly into his camp. Two deer were strung up in the chilly air. Claude sat quietly beside the smoldering fire. They announced that they were there to arrest him for poaching. The older fatter and more gruff officer reached for his gun when Claude showed no sign of complying. Claude whipped out his own pistol and shot the big man in the chest. The other officer had drawn his gun by this time but, being hesitant, was quickly gunned down by the 45 in Claude's cold hands. Being a mechanical killer of all things, he placed a 22 rifle at their temples, emptied the barrel, making sure they would rise no more. He then dumped the bodies in the river and calmly packed up camp.

The fish and game officers were missed. The government truck found on the ridge above prompted a helicopter search of the area. Soon their bodies were spotted washed ashore on a sand bar, partly eaten by coyotes. The bullet holes told the grisly story. It was clear who had done this. Bringing the quiet clay back into the county seat of Owyhee County, the law enforcement purveyors went wild. The sheriff called his sheriff friends in adjoining counties who scrambled their assault gear together. The deputies called their deputy buddies. The Boise police excused themselves from duty to join the manhunt. The FBI came and took notebooks of notes. Every one assembled in the tiny county seat amid patriotic speeches, bristling firearms, and idling 4-wheel drive trucks of all sort. In an apoplexy of rage, they set out to scour the vastness of the west for the killer. Feverishly they searched day and night, over a hundred of them, but no trace or trail of Claude could be found. K-9 dogs sniffed around every sagebrush. Helicopters plowed the winter air.

In a week of intensive search, evening beer camaraderie around the campfires, and oaths to string up the culprit, enthusiasm waned. Wisps of snow sucked the heat out of the foaming posse. Some drifted back to their counties to take care of their own business. In another week the forces were reduced to half. Then deputies returned back to their villages and wives, the Boise police returned to their beats, the funds for the chase became exhausted and, within a month, only a few of the most dedicated and desperate for the head of Dallas remained in the field.

Christmas came and went. The glacial January would not let anyone outside. In four months the manhunt was reduced to one deputy at a desk reviewing all the evidence for clues. But there were no clues. Claude had slipped deep into the hills where he was comfortable, probably constantly on the move, killing and eating animals as the animal that he was. The press had had a Christmas of its own with the story. The lone frontiersman had eluded all the law in the West with all their technology.

The talk emerged that Claude had gunned down the officers in a fair fight. They drew first but, like the Sundance Kid, Claude had been faster and gotten the drop on the police

outlaws. The government agents were the outlaws, not Claude, who was just peacefully living the Wild West dream. Rumors of his sighting began appearing from a desert store in Nevada, an outpost in New Mexico, a fishing supply shop in Montana. Nothing could be confirmed. People whom he had worked for and were in the areas of sightings were close-mouthed. Claude may have been a fugitive from this oppressive world of laws, but he was also a hero. He had gunned down two bastards in a fair fight—single-handed. “You’re welcome here, Claude” signs began to sprout on roadside truck stops and across the un-urbanized haunts of the West. Silhouettes of the fifteen-gallon hat were spray painted on road signs. A song about his heroics became popular and played in truck stop cafes. Mr. Dallas had become a cult following.

After a year and a half, Claude was all but forgotten. Only a wanted poster ten sheets down in the post office reminded us of him—if one took the time to leaf through these things. He was still there in his gigantic hat, more a poster of a South American liberator than a murderer. But he was our liberator. Our Sagebrush Rebellion liberator. The guy who would take no shit from meddling government. The West idolized the hero and loathed the dead fish and game agents.

Claude was caught by a computer. Working in a 7-11 in Alamogordo, New Mexico. The IRS cross-matched his social security number. Claude was paying taxes. A true American. Dragged off in chains, he was rapidly expedited to Idaho for a grand trial in Boise. The great unwashed came out of every corner of the desert, the cities, and the deep woods. Not to see him hang, but to cheer on his innocence. His right. His entitlement as a premiere mountain man. The courtroom was packed, the hallways packed, the street packed as the cowboy masses chanted “Dallas! Dallas! Dallas!” He got a speedy trial. The law officer mob drooled for blood.

Unrequited. The jury was Claude’s. They could see no crime here, only the removal of bureaucrats that prevented their God-given right to hunt and fish in the Promised Land. The judge was also sympathetic. After a short deliberation, the jury could find little more to convict him on than a mild manslaughter charge. The sentence: five years in a minimum-security detention.

The crowd roared in triumph, smashing police cars in the Boise streets and drinking like the Fourth of July. Fifteen-gallon hats were painted on every wall. Many hummed the Dallas song. The newspapers and talking heads re-broadcast every detail of the justified killing, selling their craft with a fervor. The news trailed off, the ranchers went home. Claude went to his new comfortable country home wearing an orange suit. Things returned to quiet—for about six months. Then spring came and Claude Dallas, feeling the freshness of the mountains on his face, the call of the wild, deftly stepped over the fence and disappeared into the West.

The pigs went berserk. The sheriff called the other sheriff, who called the other sheriff, who called the deputies, who rounded up their cousins, who called their Boise police friends, who alerted every state agency in the west. They all assembled in front of the Owyhee County court house bristling with guns and jeeps and speeches of ruination to bring in the head of the desperado. Dead or alive. In a fresh frenzy of rage, they set out to comb the hills and gullies of the West for the killer.

After a week, the beer ran out again and there was not the slightest trace of the fugitive. The deputies drifted back to their wives, the Boise police back to their beats, the FBI took notes again and returned to the coastal cities. Only the most hardcore sheriffs remained, burning taxpayer gasoline, ever fanning out into rural areas in search of a lead. But Claude needed no rural areas. Digging up a cache of guns under a mountain rock, he simple resumed the iconic

life he had created, a voraciously independent hunter and trapper. A killer. There was no trail to follow because Claude walked in streams and on outcrop rock. There was no scent but for the skinned animals he wore. There was no need for society, for friends, for human help . . . there never had been. It was like looking for a single armadillo named Walter in the state of Texas. Eventually the manhunt was reduced to one deputy at one desk reviewing the evidence for clues, waiting for a phone call, any phone call. But no one called to rat out the Hero of the West.

Two years went by. Claude Dallas remained on the lam. He was eventually captured near Denver due to a local spat with some suburbanites, moved “country,” in their six-bedroom ranch rambler. There they pretended to be farmers, growing a few miserable vegetables and running good hay through three cows they treated as pets. Claude was shooting coyotes for the bounty in their back pasture, and he considered it to be the Free West.

It had been before the 400-thousand dollar house was built on it. He was quickly beleaguered by a LL Bean-clothed housewife with a “save the animals” fanaticism, a wife who had never stepped foot off pavement in her life. The husband did his manly duty and called the cops. One thing led to another. Mr. Dallas was expatriated back to Idaho in chains, this time dumped in the maximum-security prison. The press gave it hardly a ripple, the masses somewhat bored of the subject and having forgotten the original incident. The painted hats long since faded away. Claude served his time as an exemplary inmate and was released. Now he is free to roam again. He has served his time for society. The man has been redeemed. Allowed again to do what he does best, kill living things in the name of freedom. Claude Dallas, the last outlaw in the Wild West.

21 - Last Valley Bones

The morning ice cold again. Colder than yesterday’s morn. The fire-pit a wreck again. Garbage and beer cans flung about like child’s toys in a romper room, each piece of kibble somehow evenly spaced from the other. There is a pile of vomit in the sand where Dave sat and raved about excrement late into the night. Only a few log ends remain in the fire pit, the firewood accumulation gone. I break ice out of the water jug and set it to boil. Collect a few armloads of fire fuel. Boiling water must be poured on the coffee maker to thaw it open and remove the frozen grime. In a short while, I am enjoying the hot black liquid by a small warming blaze. The group slowly assembles looking more hungover than on previous mornings. There is some wide-eyed talk of Dave’s slurred raving last night, and his consumption of fireball whiskey which he could not keep down.

A hundred sausages this morning with the proverbial scrambled eggs. This time with burnt potatoes left over from last night. One cannot be sure if the black things are sticks, carbon, or maybe flies. But it is all wolfed down like dogs. No time to be picky. Dan announces that we will all head up the main valley here about two miles. There, after pinching down for over a mile, it opens up again to over a half mile across. He tells us that this is the original site that this main camp was planned for, but the helicopter pilot was drunk or stupid or both, blindly flapping along oblivious to the proper camp spot. In desperation, Dan screamed in his ear to put the bird down here.

We all hike out at more or less the same time. I take the crummy rock hammer today so Dan can have a lightweight pick in each hand. I seem to hardly use the tools anyway and,

when I do dig, there is nothing there. I hike with Lauri and her son Dave. The fuzzy Winnie seems restored to vigor now and delights in herding our fast strolling pack of three. The way is dry riverbed. Easy walking and very pleasant. Lauri lectures Dave insistently about being a drunk and what kind of presentation that makes of himself. How this will hurt him in the small world of paleontologists. How he will be passed by as a fool. He does indeed sound like a fool, although he has studied harder than any of us, his dyslexia making for long hours of reading and re-reading the same material until almost memorized word for word. As his uncle, I have to join in on the admonishing, relating how just the rumor of being a weed smoker had halted my career in the mining industry. And yes—fuck them anyway—but still, for a young man climbing for the top, it's not the situation to get in. My sister repeats all of what she has just said, which takes us another mile up the valley. I can see Dave's hammered and hang dog demeanor as he nods and acquiesces every point over again. Eventually we stop belaboring the issue and talk small talk. I ask Dave about the trees, which cone goes to what, and he is relieved as he categorizes each we pass. He is really quite knowledgeable on the subject.

In a little over an hour we come into the widened valley, taking the side to the right out on to a large flat of slick rock where most things have been eroded away. Stopping in a small grove of trees, we peel down a few layers of clothes, making an accidental bed the dog quickly claims as his own. Others are not around, having either lingered behind or launched far ahead. Lauri and Dave head further up the valley, myself choosing to linger with the dog and check out what we have passed in greater scrutiny. Eventually I wander out, the dog watching me with a *I'll just stay here* look. Fine with me. Along the steep mud walls of the canyon I scout, bones dribbling from its sides, fractured and in poor abundance. I've seen this for the past few days, so take no special note, dig no enthusiastic holes in false expectation. Coming back to the lower "pinch" of the valley, I cross the creek and proceed along the wall in the same manner.

I love the vastness of the land. Even though I can see a half-mile in most directions, I can see no trace of others. Strange that this mile-by-half-mile open area could swallow up a dozen scientists in its mounds, gullies, slopes, and hiding places. Nothing much amusing in my path. Fragments of turtle shell and fractured unidentifiable bones. I do find about twenty black stones, rough and lumpy. Is this dino shit? I can't see any plant traces in it. None of the chopped twigs found in the other stuff elsewhere. But it's interesting anyway.

Not finding much around here. Seems the same as elsewhere. I'm sort of depressed. What exactly am I doing out here? Yeah, it's beautiful and all, but shouldn't I be doing something to save the world? Or at least save my own ass. What happens when we go back to civilization tomorrow? Where's my job? My friends? My tribe? My purpose? These thoughts put me into a spiral of dark thought. Might as well have some fatal accident out here rather than do the stupid suicide thing later with the iconic note and all that shit. *Oh, he seemed fine to me. I can't understand it*, they will all say. Damn. Even ending this merry-go-round seems trite. What to do, what to do? I decide to go see what the dog is doing. Share some lunch with it. Petting fur always seems to have meaning, if only in a momentary Zen sort of way. The animals are always so accommodating about this.

The dog is across the valley, at least that's where I left it. The land is flat for a quarter-mile, then a deep gulch, and another flat on the other side. Forty-foot cones of striped mud sit like Dr. Seuss pimples in my path, spaced a few hundred yards apart. I circle the base of one of these, noting a little bone rubble. As I round the side, there is a depression in front of me sporting dark red rock with white fleck in it. Hmmm . . . what can this be, I wonder? Getting

closer, they seem to be bones imbedded in the stone. The stone is actually two stones about the size of car hoods. On top of them now, I see this is a mass of bones. Big bones, as large as my wrist. Rib bones lined up in rows as thick as shovel handles. *This is an entire dinosaur. Wow! Holy crap! A discovery!!* Whatever it is, it's pretty scrambled. Not all arranged in a nice sitting position reading a book, but a shitload of bones. Bones have eroded out of the rocks too, and litter the ground ten feet on all sides. This is it. The full monty. The dino in place in the Matrix. All dark thoughts of my destruction instantly vanish. I am jacked up. This is incredible. I toss my pack down and fish out the camera, snapping from various angles with the pack in there for scale. Must have been a pretty big critter. I've got to tell the others. This is what they are looking for too.

Leaving everything there, I head off to toward the gulch. But then in the words of a late night TV ad: "but wait—there's more!" There in the sandstone is half a turtle shell. Then another and another. These are sticking up out of the sandstone like half buried bowls. Big bowls, two feet across and a foot out of the rock. I can see the markings on the outer shell. Amazing. A small diorama of three Sidney Opera Houses. I want to molest them, break off chunks and dig them out. I try a little digging at the base of one, but it's cemented in hard with the lithification of time.

Instead, I clear away the base and dust off the loose rubble with a paint brush. I see other smaller bones imbedded around me in the rock. Not turtle. Not like the big guy in the red rock. Birds maybe? I am almost trembling with excitement now. Hot damn. I force myself to get up and go look for the others. But first another look at Big Bertha, just to make sure it is the real thing. Yep. It is. The ribs in the rock are polished with time, a tan creamy smoothness, just waiting for me for 65 million years. OK. *Rise and seek the eggheads.* Walk carefully through the bowl zone. And here are two more turtles, not so prominent, but fossilized creatures nevertheless. Over the undulating landscape and through a small grove of trees, the ground becomes more convoluted as I near the gulch in the center of the valley. I do not see any more bones; they all seem to be back there in that one place.

Finally I see Dave wandering in seemingly aimless randomness. A sort of drunken swagger. The huge fool killer pick on his shoulder.

"Dave! Dave!" I shout across the gulch. "You have to come see this!" Sound acts weird here, reflecting off some surfaces and being adsorbed by others.

"Hunaa? Waaa?" He utters as he focuses on me across the divide.

"*Yam quaddile ma zookie!*" I shout back, just to confuse him.

"Waaaa?"

"*Dookie!*"

"Huaa. Turd! *Hunkucc, huncck.*" He ambles in my direction as I also close the gap on him. When closer, I give him a brief *Reader's Digest* version of the discovery.

"A complete dinosaur skeleton. Turtles everywhere sticking out of the rock like sails. Come on. This way. You have to see this."

"Complete skeleton? Serious?"

"No shit, Dave. Serious as Ebola."

"Well . . . uhkay. I'm coming." In fact, his giant stride outpaces me and I have to do the little hurry-up trot to stay ahead of him so he heads in the right direction. We say nothing when we come to the area. His eyes are all over everything in rapid succession, the turtles, the bones, the surroundings. Dave picks at the heap of bones a bit, identifying ribs and hips and

skull fragments.

Presently, he says: "We have to tell Dan."

"Yeah, tell Dan. Tell everybody."

"Where is he?"

"I dunno. I thought you knew."

"I think he's up the valley with Mom," he says.

"Well, let's go get him."

"Yeah. He'll want to see this."

"Hell, yeah."

We reluctantly leave the magnificent bones and head up the valley, weaving through stunted trees, small blows of sand, and choppy terrain. When we can see some distance, we see both Dan and Lauri. Dan is about a hundred feet above the valley floor on a near vertical slope of gray mud, hacking at a greenish strata. Lauri is just below him, doing little, except trying to stay attached to the wall. The overall appearance is of two beetles trying to escape a child's cardboard box, in peril of sliding back in at any moment.

We shout to them, but it is too far and the sound will not carry. "I'll go get them," says Dave. A good sport, this guy. He had always been my favorite nephew. Maybe because he maintained a non-plussed innocent view of the world. I continue to search the area for bones, but pickings are scarce here. It's as though they all accumulated in one spot, leaving elsewhere barren. I can see Dave reach the bottom of the slope and shout up to his brother. A few words I catch—"Charlie"—"whole"—but the rest is muted. Then there is acquiescence from Dan above. It can be seen in his body language. A shrug. A disengagement. Then instructions to his mom, who is glued on just below. Going down is harder than going up. Lauri very slowly, tortuously so, beginning her descent, painstakingly fitting her foot to each notch. Often she leans over and hacks a new toehold. I can see the irritation in Dan about the glacial advance she is making. He surely has a faster way, like sliding down with the pick as a tail dragger. I head back to the bones, to dust them off, photograph them again, GPS them.

When Dan and Lauri finally come over the small rise, they become giddy with awe at the turtle shell sails protruding from the rock. Dan then becomes almost prostrate at the sight of the mass of bones in the red rocks. It is like he sees his first tropical sunset. He quickly sets to lovingly handling each loose bone, fondling those that are stuck in the rock. Presently he shows me an inch and a half piece he calls a section of the skull.

"This is definitely an Ankylosaurus. The bone was so thick to prevent getting chewed through by a predator. A Theropod or larger."

Lauri sits amid the turtle shells, gently sweeping away sand, glad to be on flat ground where there is something other than debris dribbling down on her. I sit in the shade too, like a proud mother watching her children play in the kiddie park. Dan tells us, after a brief inspection, that the smaller bones are Theropod bones. If you look closely, you can see that they were hollow. Birds descended from these carnivores. After a few bites of what is left in the pack, I examine the surrounding area closer. A nearby mud hill has crocodile skin scattered atop, but after some expansive digging, I cannot come up with any connected bones. I find another turtle in a small gully, this one mostly encased in the red rock, a complete specimen. It looks like a yard tall hamburger in its bun, standing on edge. Then another turtle 50 feet away, half imbedded in the rock.

Back to where the rest are scratching around the Ankylosaurs. Dave has found a turtle

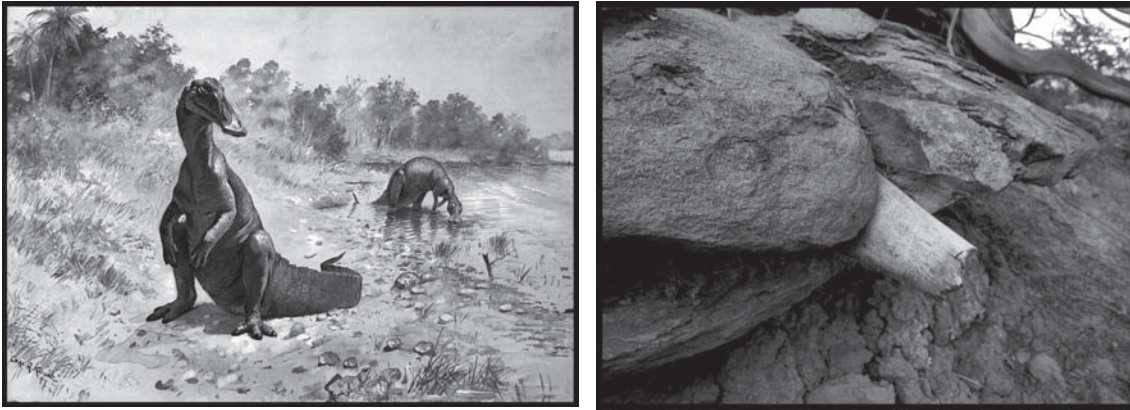


Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

in the conical mud hill. Bones are spilling out all around the shell. As if they are mosquitoes attracted to a naked animal, others appear out of the terrain. Kitty and two volunteers. They are all impressed as well, and congratulate me extensively on the discovery. I feel so damn special. I am special. Kitty, with her anatomical skills, sets down next to Dave's discovered turtle and begins assembling bones, knowing what connects to what. In a half an hour, she has assembled all four legs, each comprising 5 or 6 bones. To her delight, the toenails of each foot are there too. In themselves, these things are as big as a thumb, conical-shaped, perfect in preservation. Claws like these could dig through rock. Although the shell is still buried, the assembled legs give a great idea what sort of monster this was. Dave and some others have wandered off, coming back shortly to announce more turtle finds. Everybody has found a new turtle, some have found two. Dave has found a Hadrosaur, the jaws anyway, with its flat cow-like teeth all perfectly intact. Dan takes some time writing notes and GPS's the turtle locations, the numbers of them climbing rapidly beyond anyone's imagining. By now the day is late and we must start back to camp or be trapped in the dark, stumbling along.

We closely examine Dave's Hadrosaur jaws on the way. It is remarkable to see so many teeth, sitting there imbedded in the rock, as if still capable of devouring a ton of plant matter that is long gone. Moving along, I see more bones, which immediately leads me to another Hadrosaur. This one is scattered over a twenty-foot area, rather pulled apart, but some of the bones are protruding from the rock as though they were hastily buried yesterday. I can hardly believe this. How can this clean leg bone be so uneroded? In such divine shape. We all take the time to scratch around this new find, wanting to disturb, but not disturbing. A fine line I think. I'd like to take dynamite to it, if I had some, if it would be allowed. Which it wouldn't.

With regrets to leave, we trundle on. Each jabbering about the various parts of the discovery, how it will be excavated, what parts will be dug out first. No more is found downstream. Everything seems concentrated in this small area. Dan gives me some more congratulations. Tells me he knew it was a good idea to bring along a prospector. How I am invited to next year's collection of the site—without question. The trail is easy back to camp. We come across the bureaucrat harpy, who is browbeating her quiet Lincoln to do this and the other thing. She has found a miserable turtle fragment that she thinks is the discovery of the century. She has long-limbed Lincoln scratching to the tune of her obsessive-compulsive disorder, with what looks like a dental pick. She importantly sits on a rock, taking meaningless notes, telling him how to wrap and protect the puny specimen. She wants to tell us all about it, her moment of glory. Dan feigns great interest, being the most polite person in the West. I



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

say nothing and move away as rapidly as possible. I bow my head to the East and thank Allah that I am not this bitch's husband. *The poor bastard.*

Back at camp, the meal meaty again, the booze is lightly drunk. No one gets drunk. Dave has filled this environmental niche for some days to come. The next morning is a flurry of packing up, my sister and I being the slowest again. The hike out beautiful, lengthy, uphill. Lauri, the hairy oversized maggot, and I travel together, the others rushing ahead in their own intense stride. That is just wonderful to me, and Lauri doesn't really care, except that her sons are miles ahead and she's stuck with her brother. The dog waddles along wonderfully. A lot of boosting up the steeper parts, but it tries very hard with no sit-down strikes. I ditched about half my gear in the lower camp so that it would be a light load on the way out but, still, I am happy I don't have to carry thirty-five pounds of canine meat. The views beyond glorious again, as they were on the way in. We stop for some photo sessions. Lauri instinctively posing perfect with the designer pack and unwrinkled North Face clothes. I should sell these pictures to the company, make a little on the side. In the evening, we are back at the primary ridge camp, where new recruits have arrived for another two-week stint. Rolph makes hotdogs for everyone, his specialty dish, the same thing he makes every night. The newbies offer no help and bully to be the first in the chow line. Later a few bottles are passed around, the caps thrown in the fire, but my thirst is slacked. Slacked by the discovery. By the glory that is mine. Pictures in camera are passed around of the bone finds. Rolph becomes stupid drunk, then annoyingly maudlin, hugging us all in bear fashion. Stinking of weeks without a shower. Us avoiding him by moving to the far side of the fire. His quiet voice almost crying. Huge and pathetic.

22 - Redemption

As we plod out of the far and forgotten place, the place of rock and mud and bones, I contemplate what was the motivation that brought us all here. Mine was clear: to get out of my soggy-ass brain set, to love life again. My sister's was to be in the dog pack of her sons. Dan and JonJon to increase their standing in the hierarchy of their field through hard work and discovery, with professionalism. To Dave, to have more on his resume for applying to PhD programs, although he is not sure that's really what he wants to do. To impress people with scatology is his true desire. For the bureaucrat bitch, to get out of the office, boss volunteers around, to accumulate gossip for the other eleven months of the year. For her panic-frozen husband, Lincoln, to follow the boss without sound or question. For Kitty, an internal struggle

to get away from the cadavers and her necrophilia. Even though she cannot warm up enough to touch or ask for another's touch, she knows this is a necessary step for her redemption, which would culminate in sleeping with a live man. But she's not there yet. Big Rolph is already redeemed. He has gone to the bottom and risen again. His voice should be booming for a man that size, but is swallowed in shame of what he has been, but he is here now, living his remade life. A better man for it. For the volunteers, to test their mettle, I suppose, knowing only intellectually what it is like to shit on the ground, to eat only what you pack, to feel hunger and the wild changes of the weather beating upon your body all day, not just from the parking lot to the office. To *feel*—where there had been only urban homogenization before.

But Ted is a different story. He has secret motivations that are couched in scientific inquiry. Ted seeks redemption from his failure by stepping on the backs of all others. Climbing the stack of their crushed bodies to the top.

When back in Denver, Ted downplays the entire discovery to JonJon and Dan. The Ankylosaur is too scrambled for anybody to ever get anything out of it, he says. Basically worthless. The turtles are *ho hum*. Things are everywhere, even though there are twenty of them here all in one place—in almost perfect condition. The Hadrosaurs are also not in perfect condition, even though the jaws are with all the teeth intact. The crocodiles are rubble. The Theropod bones are insignificant. Basically Uncle Charlie didn't find jack shit. Uncle Charlie would do better looking for dimes in the city park. Keep these *armatures* out of the field. Tapio is the only real field researcher.

But the story is different to the museum. Ted shamelessly promotes himself to *National Geographic* also when they come around in curiosity. Ted has discovered the most significant bone bed in North America. This is the rival to Fire Creek in Montana where the Tyrannosaurus Sue had been dug out. This place, he is now calling it Turtle Town, has more paleo information than ten other places. Some of the turtles have preserved skin! This will allow scientists to know what color they were, what the climate was like, whether they had parasites or not, whether they had fur. Ted says he will be digging on this site he discovered for years to come with other scientists. The top turtle guy in the world is coming out to spend the summer. Complete turtle specimens will be extracted and prepared for display. These are over a meter across on the back. *With skin*—he must emphasize again.

Ted has been searching for this for fourteen years. The first twelve years were with the Salt Lake Museum, where he went out every summer with a dozen volunteers and, over the years, slept with the majority of the female half. Then two years with the Denver Museum. This bone bed is Ted's right. His inheritance. His entitlement. No matter that he did not see the first bone, or even that he was not there, this is the discovery of Tapio/Ted. No aged fatted interloper is going to claim it as "Uncle Charlie's Bone Bed." There will be no name on this but what he gives it. This is the crowning glory of his career. He will write papers about this and his esteem in the scientific community will soar. This is what he wants, *prestige*. This is what he has been searching for all the disappointing years. Now, at long last, Ted is redeemed in the eyes of his peers. He has made sure that I am not on the invite list for the next year's field work, filling the available spaces with twenty-something female paleo wannabes.

So did I really find the bone bed or did all the rest of the crew? Was I just next in line in space and time? Other opportunities existed for it to be found by more adroit scientists. Dan and Dave had hiked through here not more than five days previous. It was late and they were in a hurry to get to the main camp two miles down stream. They must have wandered within

a hundred feet of the place, if not walked right over it. But they were blinded by fatigue and hunger.

And why was the camp downstream? It had been planned to be here. Surely if it had been, the bone bed would have been stumbled on. How many things of chance had to happen for everyone else to evade the bone bed? For instance, the year before had been dry. Therefore the grass did not grow sufficiently. Then, on Rondol's Ranch, where they raise buffalo meat, the babies had not been as abundant. Because of this, there was a shortage of buffalo meat and Henrie's Buffalo Barbecue had been in short supply. Then, when the helicopter pilot took his wife out for their anniversary dinner, the BBQ buffalo was three times the price. The pilot settled on quesadillas with habanero sauce. The next morning he was rooted to the toilet. When the last red hot squirt came out, he was a half hour late to meet the paleontologists. He rushed out the door without the map or the GPS, but what would it matter? He knew the country well enough. So in an hour, when they are flying down Lost Valley, he has no idea where "X" marks the spot. He doesn't give a goddamn either; he just wants to get back on the ground and continue evacuating behind a bush. So they fly past Turtle Town unawares. The helicopter is put down at the next widening of the valley two miles down. The dry summer and the habanero sauce has inadvertently led me to my personal glory.

Was it my fate to elevate my esteem among these people and to myself? Had the hole of thought and life been so low that it could only be counteracted by such a height of a magnificent find? Cosmic sinusoidism? Did my own personal manifest destiny make it invisible to all others? I'd like to think so. But it is doubtful.

It is a node. A point in time when all else branches off. Had I not come across this, my depression would have grown again. I would have slunk back whence I came. I would remain the nobody that I was. Disappear into myself. Likely pull that trigger before the spring snow melted.

Or the branch from the node could have gone another way. All praise and glory could have been directed to me. I would be on the cover of *National Geographic* instead of Ted. I would go to the university and make an academic career of this. I would get all the volunteer pussy in late nights under the stars.

But how it is—is just fine. The satisfaction is in myself. I have left behind my hate of self. Left behind the cruel girlfriend, my beloved dog, the scraggly cats, the plug-pulled father, the dozen dead friends I called brothers.

Now I am new in spirit again. This node now sends me into unimagined places with unimagined people. I embrace the strangeness of it, the fresh uncertainties, the new challenges to myself. With this foray into the end of time, I have found new time, new directions. I have found redemption from the past, from self-destruction.

I return to live with my sister and her family, get a modest job, become a part of the community. Live life as others do, conversing among each other, neither happy or sad, mad or glad. Neither rich nor poor. Rich only in experiences. Poor only in anger at the world now. Now just coasting along, thinking of the next great thing. The next adventure: the building of a solar and wind energy plant along the Central American Mosquito Coast. The next redemption from a life misspent.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Tenth Series

*"But I'm tryin', Ringo.
I'm tryin' real hard to be the shepherd."
—Quentin Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, 1994.*

xiii. All Flesh is Lorn

All flesh is lorn. All flesh needs love.
Me to help make it so—

I let none but soft too near to me.
Dressed in my frills, always new
or what my father the tinker could provide.
I looked like my mother, his true love
years long gone, & served my needs as
I hummed & bustled to her ghost's song.

Let them each into my bedroom, once, let them
see, let them sniff. Were they carrying
me to my ruffled bed, upon whose edge
we sat? Did they pause by the window,
smell the wisps of salty sea? Not one
a look at my books, the things on my shelves.

'Twas my Aunt on those shelves, her books
of witchly lore, her secret folded maps
between hand-made covers. Her juices
to blind a man with rage, with lust,
or just blindness, if needed. This bed you
would spread me upon was a prop,
a test, a boring test.

Moonlight, full moonlight, the two of us
 wet, nude, excited, singing the old songs,
 ancestors from the stars, secret Islands,
 ur-tongues to speak with the trees,
 the beasts, the wind, earth itself.
 Dance & jump, my small breasts but
 I don't wish, I feel our songs blow
 clear through the world, through me,
 ceaseless, every fingertip, *ohhh*—

You grasp my hands, smile harder.
 Plea some imagined god my father
 stay away an extra hour. I breathe
 too, a blue-pink powder, fill you full
 & juicy, shrivel you panting dry,
full, juicy, pant, pant, dry.
 A soft whisper, your hand among
 my folds. Another, & you go.
 Crawl. Remember, crawl, & *go*.

All flesh is lorn. All flesh needs love.
 Me to help make it so—

Something in me loosened in years.
 I didn't want the hand to go, *tell me*
something true, true as your hard cock
in my hand. Push this bed away,
 paint me your want's canvas.
 Teach you teach me the desolate path,
 the humble shine from twined spasm
 to love.

That night I pushed away the bloomy powders,
 left my unwashed musk upon me,
 the curtains opened, the bed its corner,
 & when you came for me, I lay me
 on the map of the Island, its Tangled Gate,
 source of the world, & dared you come,
 dared you come hard after me, nod & laugh,
 find me, find me, dare you find
 what I am, *dare you discover this new world?*

xiv. Honey Now

My father the tinker would have me fill
with the books he hadn't. I would have
him brush my freshly washed hair most
nights. His coarse, lonely hands, clumsy
each time, but calm, & firelight, & me
her young image in my upheld mirror.

He'd even stolen books for her, he'd laugh
& redden & tell me over & over. "We had
no money, we were Travelers, but come
to a town, a rich man's open window."
Pause his brushings. Me not present.
"Oh her devilish smiles & kisses those nights!"

So I filled up on books. My Aunt, the tinker's
witchly sister, luckily had books of
spells & potions & the secrets of trees &
stars to keep me upon my studies.
Sometimes, though, I wished for myself
the fate of my dear friend Honey Now.

Honey Now was blonde & blue-eyed with
a smile to make & break hearts twice-over,
& a sweet high breast to keep even the girls
dreaming & touching low in their beds.
Honey Now lay close in my bed &
told only me her dark dreams.

"There is a starship buried under our
village, deep in the earth," I brush
her long hair as the tinker had mine own.
"The buildings have secret entrances
to below. Our river a false bottom.
Our beautiful park a stairway
deep down there. I've been all these
places, in my dreams? I don't know."

I would place my wet lips on her
 beautiful pink nipples, kiss her
 to a soft moan, lick down her tummy,
 draw her fingers & my tongue into
 her maidenhair, make her cry out,
 long & slow. Once, my father the tinker
 mistakenly came in. Not angry, not shocked,
 he nodded to me, gestured me continue,
 was quickly gone.

A traveling lecturer came to our village,
 gathered his crowds to listen &
 wonder at his travels & knowledge.
 "Alternative History!" he'd cry. "Doubt
 all your preachers & kings & any certain
 of the past, or future, or world at all!"

Honey Now trembled in my bedroom.
 Honey Now low-voiced urged me suck
 harder, *suck harder*. Honey Now
 bit me hard, & came, & came again.
 Honey Now, half naked, left to the
 night, I knew not where.

The lecturer traveled on & none
 saw Honey Now again. Some said
 they went together. They didn't know
 her like I did. I had caressed those high
 breasts they hungered. I had tasted her
 every smiling juice. I knew she
 would not leave the starship below.

I was quiet as the tinker brushed
 my hair. "You miss her, daughter.
 You will follow her?" I nodded.
 He embraced me. He wanted to say
 more. Hands me the hairbrush.
 "Now yours."

I chose the river as my route to follow.
 A good swimmer, I dove deep, it was
 night & I used my fingers each time
 I reached bottom. Nothing. Rocks.
 Weeds. Dive in. Again. More rocks.
 Nothing. Breathing hard.

Dive in again. There! A metal ring,
 pulling it, hard, & harder, afraid
 to surface for breath, lose it again.
 Pulling, *fuck!* pulling! Then it came.
 I pulled it open & climbed down,
 the water now following somehow.

Long dark metal steps into the earth.
 Eventually come somewhere,
 like a building deeply interior to
 the world. Passageways, stairs,
 more of them. Many doors, most
 leading to darkness & little else.

I don't know how long I looked.
 Days, months? No day & night
 that deep. What kind of starship
 was this? I began to tire deep down,
 forget why I'd come, her taste
 on my lips, her voice in my heart.

I found Honey Now, finally. With
 the lecturer, in a bedchamber
 of metals, leathers, chemicals,
 costumes, wide-eyed little beasts in cages,
 found my Honey Now painted with
 snakes-blood, her hair braided with rings
 & bones, her frame emaciated with hunger,
 hunger, *hunger*. Riding his big cock,
 his face in wild pain with her rageful need.



He saw me at their door, his face
 plummeted, pain gone a moment.
 Shook his head to me.

“Someday I will find a way to make
 my starship fly,” she’d once said to me.
 “All of us, flying the stars, free,
 forever.” And kissed me. And kissed me
 again. “Wouldn’t that be something? My dream!”
 Kissed me last. Fell asleep, smiling,
 against my shoulder.

xv. My First Boy

There was a Pensionne at the far
 end of our village, the one we settled
 at for some years. While my father
 twined up his tinker’s trade, his sister
 my Aunt found her work out there,
 tending its great gardens, endless lands.

Too free & feral & full of my juices for
 my father to leave me on my own,
 he sent me often to visit her as
 she labored. The gardens had long
 been left to wilds, as though this best,
 as though prosperous for all.

My Aunt saw how neglect, interrupted
 by the occasional brutal scything of all,
 had withered the place. She gave it
 a shaping hand, loving but hard
 for awhile. Weeds welcomed to a degree,
 but no longer the bullies they’d become.
 Clear the paths, prune the fruit trees.
 She worked this land from its best
 energies, long sluggish & half-dormant,
 out. Romance the green. Taught me
 simpler things. Like the *hmmm*.

Aunt eventually planted other seeds
 among the blooms, bushes, & trees.
 Grew materials for her spells, potions,
 salves. Tended & tended. *Hmmmmmm.*
 Told me of the beautiful, half-faerie
 beast who sometimes approached from afar.
 “A black-striped white tiger with blue eyes,”
 she said, “A miracle in strength & kindness.”

Sometimes I wandered the Pensionne
 itself, its many floors & hallways.
 Travelers came there from all times
 & all lands, for rest, for sanctuary.
 Sometimes their fears & fatigues undid
 themselves for a bonfire-high dance
 in the Great Hall, roofless, all the stars
 too invited in. I watched bodies dance,
 I watched bodies fuck. I watched
 sadness at lost or cut down loved ones.
All these passions resembled each other.

There was a boy. Did he belong to the
 owner or one of the Travelers?
 He was younger than me, though still
 sniffed at what I was. But his face
 wondered mine own as much, his hand
 not just to grasp & possess me, but touch,
 feel me feeling with him.

He showed me places in the Pensionne
 I had not found, cloaked closets leading
 to hidden rooms leading to new corridors.
 Older, these, earthen walls & floors.
 Breathlessly quiet, then a pack of howls,
 vibrating ground, quiet again.

Up & down stairs less steps & more clusters
 of hard leaves, to less hallways
 than branchy tunnels. We would wander
 till nightfall, I might hold his hand
 for balance, to guide, but always return
 to make my father's dinner, query his day.

He brought me to a strange clearing,
 reddish, like curtained. "Hum your songs
 here," he said, reddenning, confessing he'd
 heard me sing in the gardens with
 my Aunt. I smiled, I looked around
 this green, growing place, the red tinge
 from the leafy canopy above.

I closed my eyes & *hmmmmmm*'d for
 him, for him alone though I sensed
 others gathered. I *hmmm*'d the girl
 in me for him, *this is me touching you,*
these are our hands grasping, this is
my heart's body opening to yours.

He brought me there, again & again,
 & more shades crowded to hear.
 Something in me hesitated, pulled back,
 I think he angered, wished me naked
 reveal for him, before all. I would kneel,
 but for him alone. We did not return there.

Seeming resumed our wanders, him
 always knowing new places, now
 grasping my hand always, urging me
hmmmmmm when more often I felt
 silence. Finally came to a chamber
 where he figured to claim my body
 & perhaps lure back my heart.

A thousand candles. Stars & insects
 whirred though four walls. I did not
 resist his lead to the bed, his kisses,
 too rough, too urgent, too desperate.
 I would have ridden him, hard, to calm
 him, to hold him in place to just
 look at me, but he wanted atop,
 he wanted *drive*.

It hurt. Girls know it will, & so resist,
 but curiosity too. And what when
 I've been cleaved & bled? New pleasures?
 Power? Control? New release
 when not mine own fingers at it?

He drove & drove into me & I moved
 him just a bit with my hips. His face
 so beautiful, so anguished. *I must
 have you. I love you. I must have
 you whole. I love you. You're mine.*
 I cum so hard inside of me we both
 caterwaul with this rending. This goodbye.

Are there wet camel's lips or a good bulge
 as I dress afterwards? He says one
 thing, & another, or maybe doesn't.
 The man in him has won over the boy.
 I stay apart from him thereafter, when
 I must visit my Aunt in the gardens.

Stay apart as yet I yearn his touch,
 his mouth, his sweet hard cock.
 Her soft breasts, wild cries, deep
 wet cunt. Again & again in my bath
 I feel a young woman's shaped flesh,
 how it responds to touch. Yet in me
 too is a bone of fire, deeper than mind,
 remembering how she smiled, how she
 spread her legs to my command. How
 it felt to possess me even this hour,
 this moment, a want to tame my
 starlight, *that much, that failed.*

xvi. Asoyadonna

There was war. There's always a war,
 is it far, is it near, is it your front door?
 When occupiers come, some Travelers
 fight, some travel on. My father & Aunt
 divided me among them, she stayed
 with her gardens, refugees where she
 led them far. My father & I left.

All humen are kind but this seems more
 a belief among most than a strategy
 to survive & endure. My father sought us
 Travelers. Feared what others, anyone,
 would do to me.

That last night, a cave in the mountains,
 so cold a fire risked, he told me
 what of his life I could use. He'd fed me
 most of what little we caught, picked,
 smiled at me so tenderly I worried.
 "What's wrong?"

"They say daughters grow up to resemble
 their mothers, that makes their fathers
 love them more dearly." His face
 in shadows, words among crackles
 & snaps.

"I don't wish you her life at all.
 Wars were even more common then.
 I met her on the road, a far country
 road, I was on the run, but not her."

He laughs. "She had a knife ready for me
 when we met up that day. I told her
 if she wouldn't conscript me, I would
 defend her safety, not compromise it."

Silence. "She smiled. Then she fell into
 my arms, starving & exhausted.

"It took awhile to get her story.
 Why that road? A farm somewhere
 near, relative of her fiancé."

"Did you find it?"
 She nodded. Pressed closer to me,
 in the hidden grove of trees
 we'd found to camp. A strange man
 to her, on the run, it had been
 that bad.

He looks me straight through our fire.

“Women live in the very furies of men’s souls. They will try to love you, they will try to hurt you, the flesh they tend or tear *is their own*.”

I want to hug him. I want to calm him for all this. My heart hurts wildly for his story, his voice.

“She showed me her hairbrush one night. I fell in love with her from the moment she’d fallen into my arms. I stopped running away & began looking for protection for her.” He laughs. “She practically had to tear my clothes off the first time when it finally happened.”

I laugh. So glad for them.

“The hairbrush. When she’d gotten to the farmhouse, it’s what she most wanted. Saw it in the bedroom he led her to, payment for food & shelter. It was OK till he hurt her. Not sex. Just a taste to make suffer.”

The silence. Snaps. Crackles. “She told me she got lucky, his neck snapped cleanly. She told me if she hadn’t shifted an inch when he came upon her the hardest time, it would be her dead in that farmhouse.”

Now he’s sitting next to me. Holding my hand. Putting a small, lovely ivory hairbrush in my hand. Some of her strands still in it. Smiling. So beautiful. Urging me to sleep.

Something he arranged happened. I was given safety, suddenly many new people, feeding me, tending me without my mother’s paid price.

But he was gone. Travelers know what
they can take on, as much as they can,
& still survive. That line divided between
my father & me.

I mourned him. I didn't leave his side.
I listened to his words from that night,
again & again. My life's education in
other hours, many miles. My body's
too complex to easily tell. My heart's
education in his rough tinker's hands.
I brush my hair long & beautiful, slow, every night.

xvii. Don't Bend

At first I am kept with the other children
in the caravan, given simple things
to do, sort berries, husk nuts. I say nothing.

Then we camp outside a larger village,
one the elders say is friendly to our
presence, there are tasks to be done,
should we linger. Launderers, horsegrooms,
servants for the holiday parties.

I am reassessed. My breasts deemed full
enough for a bodice to show them,
a serving girl position in the mayor's house.
Mansion. I'm one of many but his son
notices me. Favor for all for acquiesce.

In his too frilly & ruffled bedchamber
he struggles to undress me, tho I willing.
Flaccid against my wide open hips. "Why don't
you fight back?" he hisses.

I nod, flip him to his back, a hand & mouth
on his cock before he can know.
He is a sweet, quick suck & so grateful,
confuses unpaid whoring for love.

Over the nights I harden his confidence
 although not enough to take me.
 Yet my mouth 'pon him pleases him,
 & so I try his 'pon mine in thankee.

He licks, he sucks, we both struggle with this.
 "I want to do what you do to me"
 his voice brokenly hoarse with confession.
 So sweet, so desperate, so lorn. I wish
 to please him, to salve him, to tender him,
 so. Wish, want to please him, so.

His sucks upon me now strong, now deep,
 tongue dragging up & down my shaft
 while I moan & moan again, finally
 slowly, less slowly, wildly, letting go.
 Then he finds my ass to his pleasing,
 my groans harsh, suffering, sate.

We sleep twined. His hand holding my—
 gone before dawn.

I wish to say the word love as some
 romances do. I wish to say anything
 but how curious dirty eyes saw our treasured
 coupling, & how I nearly hung or burned,
 & how our caravan fled wildly to just
 the thought of the mayor's son feasting my beautiful cock.

And me? The young girl ready to give
 or take it both? When the Travelers
 assembled finally, days & miles from there,
 I was given a pack of food, & a knife,
 allowed my hairbrush by someone's begging,
 & turned out to the road. I was cursed
 to walk alone, no family, no protection
 from the world's raw wants, & how
 it would take what offered, or not.

I had only my memory of the mayor's son,
 beautiful mouth riding my cock apparition,
 swallowing me, swallowing me, so happy
 to feel my veined hardness by his cheek
 & lips, so happy to taste my seed
 'pon his tongue, so happy, in memory,
 against all the lonely married years to come.

xviii. White Tiger

I'm unable to stay a place long.
 Come to villages a woman laborer,
 willing to plant, to pick, to scrub
 for little, willing when a manicured
 hand lifts my skirt, a few thrusts in
 me but I don't pretend to fear or enjoy.

And always the man who sees something
 else in me, flames around a doorway
 he would walk or leap or fall through, but
 not yet. I let these men bandit into
 my heart, let empathy, not eros,
 lead me to their barns, their woods,
 their happiness at a hard cock in them,
 or just astride their cheeks, or theirs
 in me. For them I moan, remember
 my first boy, my Honey Now, feel something.

The women less often, less needful
 of me because what men will pay
 to watch, women will find chambers
 to enjoy without a hundred hands
 & pairs of eyes sweaty & pulling.
 Some of these men still tasting my sweet cum.



Yes, I make my way back toward my village,
 lost home, Aunt, Pensionne. It is years
 but the war moves on. I return at night,
 not by the front door, but the gate,
 tis still there, leads me into the garden.
 Mean to find a place to sleep,
 encounter my Aunt first by calmer day.

The garden looks bigger at night,
 looks prosperous, the presence of
 weed patches among the blooms & tress
 is my Aunt's signature. She crooned
 to them especially, unloved,
 remarked how their lives not unlike
 Travelers, survive, endure, rarely bloom.
 With her, they tamed, they bloomed.

Did the hours to come really occur?
 I was just about to my sleep,
 my blanket & clothes wrapped about me,
 a loose bush my cover, when a flash
 took my glance. I stood, ready to fight
 or surrender, but standing. But away
 went the figure, rapidly. Forgetting myself,
 I followed, rapidly, strangely shed
 my shoes, my clothes, faster, &
 faster, now calling, me calling!

"Please! I am no danger! Who are you?
 Please! Don't go!" Pleading, crying,
 I slow, defeated, wordlessly sad of this.

He approaches. Slowly. Large, silent.
 A beast, padding nearer to me.
 I don't move. Yet don't fear. Blue eyes,
 the color of deep sea. White fur,
 long black stripes. Kindly, curious,
 afear'd. I rise to a crouch, holding
 out my hands. Approach. He sniffs me,
 twice, & nears. His fur remembers me
 happiness, all what lost, *all what lost*.

I look deep into his blue eyes, &
 find past fear, curiosity, a calm,
 a timeless calm, & I hug his great body
 closer as I can, & I listen, &
 I twice listen, & I hear it, I hear
 the *hmmmmmm* I know so well,
 what I've rare in years tried in me,
 it pulls my heart in & I croak,
 I whisper, I cough. Try again. Choke a little.
Try again. Hmm Hmmmmmm
Hmmmmmm. We meld into song,
 voice into voice, no longer girl &
 beast, one song, *we too are one*.

Long deep hours & I sleep & I dream
 of my new friend as he carries me
 back to my bush, my clothes, my things.
 Curls around me as the light
 pads in, as softly, as curiously,
 as powerfully as he did.

I wake & wonder where my friend's fur
 has gone! Where his stipes? What this
 human form now? Where his own
 gorgeous one?

She waits. Knows. The White Tiger's
 encounter is gift from other times,
 his touch a magick few know.
 She gathers me up & quiet & unseen
 into a chamber. Comes to see me
 often as I writhe. As his face
 lays securely upon my heart even
 as my eyes release to see in
 common light again.

She holds me as I cry new. "This is
 only the beginning, my child,
 my sweet. He will never leave you,
 & you will find your path hereon."
 Closes the door, returns to her work,
 I see your eyes, loving me. Shudder. Shudder. *Miracle*.

xix. Anomaly

In dreams, I am negotiating with a snake,
 riding slow down a parchment of paper,
 a line, a purple line down its edge,
 curls & loops near the bottom, & arrives
 at the bottom of the page flourishing into
 the image of the hooded purple snake.
 "Sign!" I say. "Sign!" I command, to seal
 my promise that the snakes may come
 again, & our strong poisons will not kill them all.

Awake strange to daylight, dry-mouthed,
 uncertain everything. Listen. No sounds
 in the hall. My Aunt has hid me well.
 Wait. Wish I dreamt of White Tigers
 not purple snakes. Regrets. Lonely.

She comes at night, when her many tasks
 are finished. Brings me stale bread,
 fruits, nuts. Water. As though me still
 a child, she pulls my garments &
 things from me & tumbles me into
 a large basin. Scrubs me good,
 scrubs me with love. Learns my body
 again, tender spots, what worn, what calloused.

Instructions to *lift*, to *bend*, to *hold*,
 nothing else. Finally, I speak.

"What am I, Aunt?"

"What?"

"*What am I?*"

She pauses, looks at me. Her dark hair
 in a long thick braid down her back,
 her black eyes, shrewd, fearful, kind,
 ever watching. Speaks softly at last.

"What do you think you are?"

"I'm a girl."

"Yes."

"But sometimes like a man too."

Says slowly: "Tell me."

I take her hand from sponging my shoulders
 & lead it down between my legs.
 Close my eyes & think of the mayor's son,
 his voice, his touch. Grow heated. Grow hard.

She gasps. "It's . . . beautiful."

"*What . . . am . . . I?*"

She lets me go slowly. "An experiment."

"Experiment?"

Stands me up, towels me off, a deep soft robe,
 leads me to my bed, a brush down
 my long auburn hair, long, slow strokes.
 Which brush? I wonder dreamily. I trust
 she will tell me what I need.

"You're from Emandia, a place far from
 here, & now dead & cold. You came here
 with many others. Your father & I
 took care of you because this is part
 of what Travelers do. Why we travel.
 To nurture you & then let you make
 your way. Integrate."

"Why?"

She shakes her head. Stops & starts brushing
 again. "I don't know."

"Why am I made so?"

"They could not understand male & female.
 One *or* the other. Why not neither? Why not
 both?"

"Don't they have male & female?"

"No. Their bodies form & mold by wish,
 by need, for pleasure, for purpose."

"Thus I am?"

She smiles sadly at me. "It didn't work here.
 The chasm won't be breached." Then she
 bustles me under covers & out the light.

“Shall I stay with you, Aunt?”
 “No. Your home is here but not your path.”
 “Where shall I go?”

A voice soft in my ear. “I don’t know
 your days to come, but I do know
 where you are finally bound.”

Long silence. Then: “The Tangled Gate.”

xx. Last Night at Pensionne

Again, dreaming of the purple snake.
 Always negotiating down the parchment,
 conclude with the signatures, cessation
 of the poisons. Peace.

I push a little, impatient. Wave about us
 a Woods, a skyfull of heavy stars, heavier
 moon. Cold night. Warm fire between us.

Now you. You are large, tall as me as
 you are risen up, hood wide about you
 like a sail. Dark, diamond eyes snapping
 in the sparks. As knowing as me.

“This is not my dream of you.”
 Low, hissy, very masculine: “Nor mine of you.”
 “Why do we keep meeting to negotiate?
 What poisons must I agree to cease?”
 Quiet. Grappling for words in my tongue.

Then: "Men poison the world by their nature.
They root amongst each other, not the earth
or the trees, the water or sky."

"I'm not a man."

"No. Perhaps why I try with you."

"What are you?"

Rising higher up before me, shading out stars
& moon & the sky itself. "I am what
you fail to see in daylight, the beautiful
power of this world, its fragile, its pathos!"

"What can I do? I don't know my place
in the world!"

Fading, fading now, morning. Have I slept
all night in this garden? Cold, achey.
Yet a sense of the purple lingers & I see
tis the flecks in the blue eyes of
the approaching White Tiger. My friend!

He lays himself warmly around me
beneath the oak tree above us.

"I'm still dreaming."

No reply.

"You've come to say goodbye." A lean closer.

"What am I to do?"

Speaks, such a beautiful animal's voice. "Find the others."

For awhile, both of us quiet. I am willing
to sleep, to keep him near to me.
But then, no, a thought. "What is The Tangled Gate?"

He sings in my mind now, *hmmms* with pictures,
lavishes pictures in my mind, too many
of them, I try to slow & look at just one.
Tis a Hummingbird, like from the old stories,
first taught men to sing, & some say we will remember
our first song again one day, & fly away.

I follow the Hummingbird through Woods,
 deep, pathless woods, & come out to behold
 a monstrously tall Gate but, afraid, I shift
 my eye away, lose it, continue alone,
 & now come to a great black cave where
 I feel the White Tiger would lead me but,
 again, I am afraid, his *hmmmming* shifts,
 is another's, one I cannot see, then a
 tiny twittering thing, cackling perhaps.
 Paths, possibles. I close my eyes. I do not know.

"Please, my friend, who are the others?
 How do I find them?" I feel his mercy
 encompass me, his empathy. I live
 among men & women, am shaped like them,
 I don't know other ways to be.

He brings me to the road leading
 from the Pensionne into the village
 & out to the world. Empty fields, woods,
 ever moving, till come to a harbor,
 come to a boat, & there a man, face
 kept from me, wearing a long leather coat,
 carrying a strange walking stick with
 him. Boarding his passage. "*Go, my love!*"

I wake in my bed. There the tea cup I'd
 drunk last night. Earth creatures of my
 Aunt's, a few spices, an herb or two.
 My things clean, packed, a second bag
 I guess from her.

I wash. I dress. I trust. I *go*.



xxi. *Sueños*

We are among the passengers crowded
 into the Captain's quarters. No bed,
 no writing table. Buckets of water
 alter with stools across the room,
 & on the walls, & on the ceiling.
 Queer magick tied to the leaping
 prowess of our tiny captain, an inch
 high. A wide-eyed panda bear in
 a blouse & skirt? Well, so.

[*"Just sueños," my Aunt would call
 this. Sleep or dreams." But her crooked
 smile, more, if I liked.*]

We new passengers, arrived this morning,
 were led to these quarters, arrayed
 across the wall next the doorway.
 Half dozen of us, about, & the man
 from my dreams among us. Face still turned.

I wait. The Captain leaps with a cackling
 cry from a stool the far end of the room,
 into a bucket of water & out to the next
 stool, in & out & leap on, over & over,
 until she nears the wall & cackling
 wildly lands in the bucket affixed
 the wall, its water held in as though
 spelled, thence the bucket
 hanging from the ceiling, *splash!* & then a
 long leap to the far wall's bucket
 & *splash!* & finally back to the landed
 buckets, now faster a circuit through,
 & up, & high, & over, & back, & a third
 pass so blurring she is gone before
 we know to know. *Gone.*

There is silence among us. The ship is
 far out from port now, this display
 strange but not threatening. We file
 out like a bard has fallen his
 last curtain, & each of us to his
 own room.

[*“Sueños, my sweet. This world full
 of them. Ours to embrace, to follow,
 or let ourselves grow dull & old.”*]

I sit in my room, my old thin mattress,
 my window a porthole my fist would
 hardly go through, my hours' view of grey day
 passing over endless water. I don't
 know what I am but there is a man
 who may.

I stumble the hallway, wondering
 which closed door is his. A woman
 knocking at any might as well drop
 her clothes & name her price. But his
 is open. Him asleep at a table.
 A candle's light shows the maps
 & books he had studied.

But what strange than a sleeping man
 are the shades & figments about his head!
 Owls, bats, flying things nameless & vile,
 silently swarm about him, fading
 in & out, emerging from him somehow?
 Suddenly flee, one & all, before a bigger
 thing, a great powerful Beast that
 seems to see my spying & lunges
 toward me. I cry, yet somehow
 do not fall back.

[“*Sueños, no more, no less, but what are they? Would you turn away any offered power?*”]

In this chaos'd moment I find our wee
Captain at rest & smiling in the palm
of my left hand! And the sleeping
man looking at me curiously, standing
in his doorway.

“*Ta-da!*” she cries, bites my palm
for departure to the floor, & skitters
on her way.

The man still gazing me, I redden,
apologize. “You cried out from your
sleep.” He nods, smiles. “Just *sueños*,
Miss.” Stands, walks over, but then
“good night” & closes the door.

Returning to my room, my bed,
my questions. Sway & creak of this
old ship lands me slow to sleep,
still in my woman's clothes, even as
I feel my body shift uncertainly,
growlingly between a want to bed that man
& maybe a deeper one to friend him,
learn his maps & his plans, align
my own, discover how to guard
his *sueños* ever against his mind's
nighttime wilds, its frenzied fissures.



* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz

Levi's Genes

[Travel Journal]

A week later, Joaquín and I prepared to drink again.

A Secoya in his 20s was visiting from Peru. He didn't want to drink in the ceremony. He'd snuck in through Colombia because Ecuador and Peru were enemies and their border had been a military zone since 1941. His name was Reinaldo Levi. My family on my father's side belongs to the Jewish tribe of Levi. I wondered at the coincidence. At dusk, as Joaquín and I were hanging hammocks for the ceremony, I asked Reinaldo: "Levi—is that an indigenous name?"

Reinaldo said, "No, it comes from the old boss."

"What old boss?"

"Mauricio Levi. A Peruvian."

"That's a Jewish name. It's in my family. My last name is Levine, and Levi is my tribe. We're all descended from one guy in the Bible. This Mauricio was probably a distant relative of mine. OK, go on. What's the story?"

Joaquín chimed in and told the story, his Paicoca-influenced Spanish grammar relying heavily on progressive verbs. "First we Secoyas working under another guy, a good boss, Paco Carmona. Tapping rubber. Then Carmona dying and Mauricio becoming the boss. He wanting too much work. We working for him six days a week. Seventh day, hunting. He had a lot of people working for him. He keeping their children under the house so people couldn't leaving. A lot of us on this river moving to Cuyabeno to escape from him, 1942, time of the war between Ecuador and Peru. Later, the people there killing Mauricio Levi. First hitting him on the back with a canoe paddle, then the shamans bewitching, and he dying. The people taking his name."

Thinking about how everything's connected in subtle ways, I nodded, and cracked open a soft, green, spiky achiote pod with a barely audible *pok*. I lifted it to my nostrils and sniffed its sweet pungency, then finger-painted spots of its oily crimson juice on my nose, cheeks, and chin. Reinaldo said good night and went off to bathe in the river before going to sleep in the other hut.

As I begin to choom, I reflect: *I'm distantly related to a guy who once enslaved my teacher. My people have met these people before. Our stories have already intertwined.*

In fact, in the whole world there's only one story, intricately intertwined, with infinite roots and branches.

There's only one story, I repeat to myself like a mantra. How well do I know the story?

When the yagé comes on strong, I yelp and howl and groan and stutter and do things with my voice that there are no words for. Joaquín and I sing hard in otherworldly ecstasy.

I'm an immortal soul curled in a weightless darkness. Hundreds of tiny windows surround me. Each looks in on one of my material lives.

Beginning to come down, I watch the dancing lights of fireflies outside the hut. The thought flashes in my mind: *They're celestial spirits in the form of insects.* They blink in answer: *Yes, we are.*

The predawn calm reverberates with insect song. A rooster crows, the sound's clarity echoing in my thoughts. I wonder if Reinaldo Levi's awake, sifting through the local sounds for rumors of distant game in the forest.

I remember the original Levi from the *Book of Genesis*. I read about him in college. One of Jacob's twelve sons. One I wouldn't want to mess with.

The prince of a neighboring tribe raped Levi's sister Dina.

Levi said, "OK, you had sex with her, you have to marry her."

The prince agreed.

Levi said, "To marry her, you have to be circumcised."

The prince agreed.

Levi said, "To satisfy our traditions, all the other men of your group have to be circumcised too. Then you can marry her."

The prince agreed.

The prince and his men circumcised themselves. While they were resting there in their pain, Levi and his brother Simeon went over and butchered them and brought Dina home. That's my badass ancestor, the guy my tribe is named after.

And that distant cousin of mine, Cousin Mauricio, another of Levi's descendants, enslaved the Secoyas until they couldn't take it any more. Then they killed him and took his name as if it were a trophy of war.

Just as Levi himself would have done.

At dawn, Reinaldo appeared wearing a baseball cap and carrying a shotgun. He said he was going hunting and asked if he could paint his face with my achiote pod, which was still lying on the edge of the floor. I said sure, and we looked at each other and smiled, thinking the same thought, that the achiote in that pod was charged with power because I wore some of it on my face during the intense ceremony. Reinaldo rubbed the bright red pigment on his forehead and cheeks and strode off down the path that led away from the river into the forest.

At four in the afternoon, I was carrying a pot of water back from a stream to the hut when I had a sudden thought that the visitor had just killed an animal.

Two hours after that, Reinaldo Levi reappeared on the path with a big smile on his face, carrying a dead deer on his shoulders.

* * * * *



The Cenacle | 91 | December 2014

Had I worn my spandex suit, the forceful pressure of that toot
would have made my hind-end quarters bubble, looking queer.
Not a dookie, not a deuce, but methane leaked from my caboose
would make my booty like a pair of lower lungs appear;
like some breathing, backporch-butthole-bagpipes might appear
—fart-inflated towards the rear.

Should I, speaking, clear the air? Perhaps inspect my underwear?
I continued sitting there politely sipping beer,
wondering if cutting cheese can ruin brand new BVDs,
when yet more ghastly bowel-breeze escaped for all to hear.
Shooting from the hip, I let 'er rip for all to hear
glad it was not diarrhea.

With Bart and Billy busy fighting—punching, pinching, kicking, biting
—perching, as it were, upon my stool, I drank my beer
'whilst from out my rearward door there didst pour in ceaseless roar
noises many morons in the Bronx would think a cheer
—noxious notes those Gotham goats and Bronx boobs call a cheer
ending Jeter's long career.

Billy poking, pugilistic versus Bart, antagonistic,
locked in mortal combat choking, having no idea
of the foetid, bilious source ('twas my foghorn blasts of course . .
much more odorific than the low tide in Revere).
Such a thick, horrific stench it dignified Revere.
Do such blowouts leave a smear?

The colon-trumpet, bum-kazoo, fanny-trumpet proudly blew
vapor only. “Where’s the poo, my keester-chanticleer?”
I, unmoved, to myself muttered even as my heinie sputtered
like a tractor-trailer having trouble shifting gear
—a tractor-trailer growling, rasping, howling shifting gear.
I, embarrassed, shed a tear

when one final nasty tune ejected from my ass-bassoon
(enough to fill a large balloon) defiled the atmosphere.
Guilty culprit without question, I endeavored this confession,
“Tis a touch of indigestion,” I explained, sincere.
“Tis my chronic indigestion,” said I, quite sincere.
“No, I don’t have diarrhea.”

The Big Stop

How amusingly antic they are
 driving their silly clown car;
 a big bunch of bozos,
 slap-happy stooges,
 circling,
 bouncing
 —Bizarre!
 Beeping and honking
 they cough
 they choke
 as wheel rims scrape
 and flat tires slide
 until, with a “POP!”
 it comes to a stop
 concluding their pointless ride.
 There’s a gigantic geyser of smoke . . .
 Fourteen fools jump out of the joke.
 How did they all fit inside?

Laugh!
 Are you satisfied?

The circus will run out of gas.
 The calliope has missing keys.
 There are no nets should someone drop
 when a rope snaps on the trapeze.
 Bring on the shovel and mop.
 All flesh is nothing but grass.

Harlequin colors will fade grayish-brown,
 lights will blink dark, tents will come down,
 and time will disperse faint circus smells
 of sawdust, popcorn, peanut shells,
 Cracker Jacks, candy, and waffle-cones.
 The Fat Lady will be skin and bones.

In this, the last of the one-horse towns,
 they burn dead elephants.

Grieve
 for dead clowns.

* * *

Questions

I grew up in a different time . . .
 I've watched societal values change . . .
 So I question myself: Am I being creepy?
 I wonder if maybe I'm strange.
 I try very hard to avoid being creepy.
 I think there are too many creepy old men.
 Is it okay for me then to ask for your panties
 —or am I being creepy again?
 Can I ask all your friends what you're going to be doing
 so I can just show up wherever you go
 —so I can just sit there and stare at you, drooling?
 Would that be too creepy? 'Cause I never know.
 If I followed you back home, would that be too creepy?
 Do you mind if I peek through your windows at night
 and get a few snapshots of you while undressing?
 Is that being creepy?
 Would that be alright?

And supposing I Photoshopped your yearbook picture
 onto the computer-porno I get . . .
 —would that be over-the-top and creepy?
 God forbid I should make you upset . . .
 If I broke in and took home your shower curtain
 (like I broke in and took home your bedsheets last week . . .),
 would you think I'm a creep?
 I just need to be certain
 you wouldn't start treating me like I'm a freak.
 Or perhaps I could hide somewhere dark—like your closet,
 crawl out of the shadows and watch as you sleep . . .
 and lean over you like I'm going to kiss you . . .

But, you'd probably think I'm a creep,
 like the time I called at two in the morning
 and started loud breathing into the phone,
 then, after a while, in a deep voice mumbled:
 "What are you wearing? Are you there alone?"
 Remember that humid day last September
 you caught me lapping the seat of your car . . ?
 probing the glove box . . ? sniffing the vinyl . . ?
 Was that being creepy or going too far?

Is it weird to ask for a bottle of bathwater,
 —root in your trash?
 Is it crossing a line
 to dump-dive for something that smells like you touched it?
 I'm making a shrine
 of your toiletries, hairbrush, a half-eaten burger,
 and one precious size-seven black leather shoe.
 I've been looking real hard for some discarded panties . . .
 Does that seem to creepy to you?

I don't WANT to be creepy . . .
 but maybe I am.
 Maybe it's hard showing how much I care . . .
 Is it too old-fashioned to tell you I love you
 —and how much I'd treasure your used underwear?

* * *

Thoughtful

He searched around for “the perfect gift”
 to give to his best and only friend
 on his birthday. He’d know he was thinking of him
 —but he didn’t have much to spend.

He considered a book, since he liked to read,
 or something more personal he might need;
 a pull-over sweater or sweater-vest
 so he could go places appearing well-dressed.

In shops and stores with crowded aisles,
 indecisive, he hunted meandering . . .
 There were so many options from which to choose.
 Then at last he discovered the ideal thing.
 A box at home would fit just right . . .
 He rolled it in tissue and placed it inside . . .
 He folded the box. He taped the box tight.
 The wrapping paper he used was white.
 He tied it with ribbon, then finally
 inscribed the gift card. Quote: “This is for me.”

When he looked at his one gift he felt excited.
 When he opened the gift he was simply delighted.

* * * * *





Babylon, Revisited

[Classic Fiction]

"And where's Mr. Campbell?" Charlie asked.

"Gone to Switzerland. Mr. Campbell's a pretty sick man, Mr. Wales."

"I'm sorry to hear that. And George Hardt?" Charlie inquired.

"Back in America, gone to work."

"And where is the Snow Bird?"

"He was in here last week. Anyway, his friend, Mr. Schaeffer, is in Paris."

Two familiar names from the long list of a year and a half ago. Charlie scribbled an address in his notebook and tore out the page.

"If you see Mr. Schaeffer, give him this," he said. "It's my brother-in-law's address. I haven't settled on a hotel yet."

He was not really disappointed to find Paris was so empty. But the stillness in the Ritz bar was strange and portentous. It was not an American bar any more—he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it. It had gone back into France. He felt the stillness from the moment he got out of the taxi and saw the doorman, usually in a frenzy of activity at this hour, gossiping with a *chasseur* by the servants' entrance.

Passing through the corridor, he heard only a single, bored voice in the once-clamorous women's room. When he turned into the bar he traveled the twenty feet of green carpet with his eyes fixed straight ahead by old habit; and then, with his foot firmly on the rail, he turned and surveyed the room, encountering only a single pair of eyes that fluttered up from a newspaper in the corner. Charlie asked for the head barman, Paul, who in the latter days of the bull market had come to work in his own custom-built car—disembarking, however, with due nicety at the nearest corner. But Paul was at his country house today and Alix giving him information.

"No, no more," Charlie said. "I'm going slow these days."

Alix congratulated him: "You were going pretty strong a couple of years ago."

"I'll stick to it all right," Charlie assured him. "I've stuck to it for over a year and a half now."

"How do you find conditions in America?"

"I haven't been to America for months. I'm in business in Prague, representing a couple of concerns there. They don't know about me down there."

Alix smiled.

"Remember the night of George Hardt's bachelor dinner here?" said Charlie. "By the way, what's become of Claude Fessenden?"

Alix lowered his voice confidentially: "He's in Paris, but he doesn't come here any more. Paul doesn't allow it. He ran up a bill of thirty thousand francs, charging all his drinks and his lunches, and usually his dinner, for more than a year. And when Paul finally told him he had to pay, he gave him a bad check."

Alix shook his head sadly.

"I don't understand it, such a dandy fellow. Now he's all bloated up—" He made a plump apple of his hands.

Charlie watched a group of strident queens installing themselves in a corner.

"Nothing affects them," he thought. "Stocks rise and fall, people loaf or work, but they go on forever." The place oppressed him. He called for the dice and shook with Alix for the drink.

"Here for long, Mr. Wales?"

"I'm here for four or five days to see my little girl."

"Oh-h! You have a little girl?"

Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain. It was late afternoon and the streets were in movement; the *bistros* gleamed. At the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines he took a taxi. The Place de la Concorde moved by in pink majesty; they crossed the logical Seine, and Charlie felt the sudden provincial quality of the Left Bank.

Charlie directed his taxi to the Avenue de l'Opera, which was out of his way. But he wanted to see the blue hour spread over the magnificent façade, and imagine that the cab horns, playing endlessly the first few bars of *Le Plus que Lent*, were the trumpets of the Second Empire. They were closing the iron grill in front of Brentano's Bookstore, and people were already at dinner behind the trim little bourgeois hedge of Duval's. He had never eaten at a really cheap restaurant in Paris. Five-course dinner, four francs fifty, eighteen cents, wine included. For some odd reason he wished he had.

As they rolled on to the Left Bank and he felt its sudden provincialism, he thought, "I spoiled this city for myself. I didn't realize it, but the days came along one after another, and then two years were gone, and everything was gone, and I was gone."

He was thirty-five, and good to look at. The Irish mobility of his face was sobered by a deep wrinkle between his eyes. As he rang his brother-in-law's bell in the Rue Palatine, the wrinkle deepened till it pulled down his brows; he felt a cramping sensation in his belly. From behind the maid who opened the door darted a lovely little girl of nine who shrieked "Daddy!" and flew up, struggling like a fish, into his arms. She pulled his head around by one ear and set her cheek against his.

"My old pie," he said.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, dads, dads, dads, dads!"

She drew him into the salon, where the family waited, a boy and a girl his daughter's age, his sister-in-law and her husband. He greeted Marion with his voice pitched carefully to avoid either feigned enthusiasm or dislike, but her response was more frankly tepid, though she minimized her expression of unalterable mistrust by directing her regard toward his child. The two men clasped hands in a friendly way and Lincoln Peters his for a moment on Charlie's shoulder.

The room was warm and comfortably American. The three children moved intimately about, playing through the yellow oblongs that led to other rooms; the cheer of six o'clock spoke in the eager smacks of the fire and the sounds of French activity in the kitchen. But Charlie did not relax; his heart sat up rigidly in his body and he drew confidence from his daughter, who from time to time came close to him, holding in her arms the doll he had brought.

"Really extremely well," he declared in answer to Lincoln's question. "There's a lot of business there that isn't moving at all, but we're doing better than ever. In fact, damn well. I'm bringing my sister over from America next month to keep house for me. My income last year was bigger than it was when I had money. You see, the Czechs—"

His boasting was for a specific purpose; but after a moment, seeing a faint restiveness in Lincoln's eye, he changed the subject:

"Those are fine children of yours, well brought up, good manners."

"We think Honoria's a great little girl too."

Marion Peters came back from the kitchen. She was a tall woman with worried eyes, who had once possessed a fresh American loveliness. Charlie had never been sensitive to it and was always surprised when people spoke of how pretty she had been. From the first there had been an instinctive antipathy between them.

"Well, how do you find Honoria?" she asked.

"Wonderful. I was astonished how much she's grown in ten months. All the children are looking well."

"We haven't had a doctor for a year. How do you like being back in Paris?"

"It seems funny to see so few Americans around."

"I'm delighted," Marion said vehemently. "Now at least you can go into a store without their assuming you're a millionaire. We've suffered like everybody, but on the whole it's a good deal pleasanter."

"But it was nice while it lasted," Charlie said. "We were sort of royalty, almost infallible, with a sort of magic around us. In the bar this afternoon"—he stumbled, seeing his mistake—"there wasn't a man I knew."

She looked keenly at him. "I should think you'd have had enough of bars."

"I only stayed a minute. I take one drink every afternoon, and no more."

"Don't you want a cocktail before dinner?" Lincoln asked.

"I take only one drink every afternoon, and I've had that."

"I hope you keep to it," said Marion.

Her dislike was evident in the coldness with which she spoke, but Charlie only smiled; he had larger plans. Her very aggressiveness gave him an advantage, and he knew enough to wait. He wanted them to initiate the discussion of what they knew had brought him to Paris.

At dinner he couldn't decide whether Honoria was most like him or her mother. Fortunate if she didn't combine the traits of both that had brought them to disaster. He thought he knew what to do for her. He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything else wore out.

He left soon after dinner, but not to go home. He was curious to see Paris by night with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days. He bought a *strapontin* for the Casino and watched Josephine Baker go through her chocolate arabesques.

After an hour he left and strolled toward Montmartre, up the Rue Pigalle into the Place Blanche. The rain had stopped and there were a few people in evening clothes disembarking from taxis in front of cabarets, and *cocottes* prowling singly or in pairs, and many Negroes. He passed a lighted door from which issued music, and stopped with a sense of familiarity; it was Bricktop's, where he had parted with so many hours and so much money. A few doors farther on he found another ancient rendezvous and incautiously put his head inside. Immediately an

eager orchestra burst into sound, a pair of professional dancers leaped to their feet and a maître d'hôtel swooped toward him, crying, "Crowd just arriving, sir!" But he withdrew quickly.

"You would have to be damn drunk," he thought.

Zelli's was closed, the bleak and sinister cheap hotels surrounding it were dark; up in the Rue Blanche there was more light and a local, colloquial French crowd. The Poet's Cave had disappeared, but the two great mouths of the Café of Heaven and the Café of Hell still yawned—even devoured, as he watched, the meager contents of a tourist bus—a German, a Japanese, and an American couple who glanced at him with frightened eyes.

So much for the effort and ingenuity of Montmartre. All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale, and he suddenly realized the meaning of the word "dissipate"—to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something. In the little hours of the night every move from place to place was an enormous human jump, an increase of paying for the privilege of slower and slower motion.

He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab.

But it hadn't been given for nothing.

It had been given, even the most wildly squandered sum, as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember—his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont.

In the glare of a *brasserie*, a woman spoke to him. He bought her some eggs and coffee, and then, eluding her encouraging stare, gave her a twenty-franc note and took a taxi to his hotel.

II

He woke upon a fine fall day—football weather. The depression of yesterday was gone and he liked the people on the streets. At noon he sat opposite Honoria at Le Grand Vatel, the only restaurant he could think of not reminiscent of champagne dinners and long luncheons that began at two and ended in a blurred and vague twilight.

"Now, how about vegetables. Oughtn't you to have some vegetables?"

"Well, yes."

"Here's *épinards* and *chou-fleur* and carrots and *haricots*."

"I'd like the *chou-fleur*."

"Wouldn't you like to have two vegetables?"

"I usually only have one at lunch."

The waiter was pretending to be inordinately fond of children. "*Qu'elle est mignonne la petite! Elle parle exactement comme une Française.*"

"How about dessert? Shall we wait and see?"

The waiter disappeared. Honoria looked at her father expectantly.

"What are we going to do?"

"First, we're going to that toy store in the Rue Saint-Honoré and buy you anything you like. And then we're going to the vaudeville at the Empire."

She hesitated. "I like it about the vaudeville, but not the toy store."

"Why not?"

"Well, you bought me this doll." She had it with her. "And I've lots of things. And we're

not rich any more, are we?"

"We never were. But today you are to have anything you want."

"All right," she agreed resignedly.

When there had been her mother and a French nurse he had been inclined to be strict; now he extended himself, reached out for a new tolerance; he must be both parents to her and not shut any of her out of communication.

"I want to get to know you," he said gravely. "First let me introduce myself. My name is Charles J. Wales, of Prague."

"Oh, Daddy!" her voice cracked with laughter.

"And who are you, please?" he persisted, and she accepted a role immediately: "Honorina Wales, Rue Palatine, Paris."

"Married or single?"

"No, not married. Single."

He indicated the doll. "But I see you have a child, madame."

Unwilling to disinherit it, she took it to her heart and thought quickly: "Yes, I've been married, but I'm not married now. My husband is dead."

He went on quickly, "And the child's name?"

"Simone. That's after my best friend at school."

"I'm very pleased that you're doing so well at school."

"I'm third this month," she boasted. "Elsie"—that was her cousin—"is only about eighteenth, and Richard is at the bottom."

"You like Richard and Elsie, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I like Richard quite well, and I like her all right."

Cautiously and casually he asked: "And Aunt Marion and Uncle Lincoln—which do you like best?"

"Uncle Lincoln, I guess."

He was increasingly aware of her presence. As they came in, a murmur of "... adorable" followed them, and now the people at the next table bent all their silences upon her, staring as if she were something no more conscious than a flower.

"Why don't I live with you?" she asked suddenly. "Because mamma's dead?"

"You must stay here and learn more French. It would have been hard for Daddy to take care of you so well."

"I don't really need much taking care of any more. I do everything for myself."

Going out of the restaurant, a man and a woman unexpectedly hailed him.

"Well, the old Wales!"

"Hello there, Lorraine. . . . Dunc."

Sudden ghosts out of the past: Duncan Schaeffer, a friend from college. Lorraine Quarries, a lovely, pale blonde of thirty; one of a crowd who had helped them make months into days in the lavish times of three years ago.

"My husband couldn't come this year," she said, in answer to his question. "We're poor as hell. So he gave me two hundred a month and told me I could do my worst on that. . . . This your little girl?"

"What about coming back and sitting down?" Duncan asked.

"Can't do it." He was glad for an excuse. As always, he felt Lorraine's passionate, provocative attraction, but his own rhythm was different now.

"Well, how about dinner?" she asked.

"I'm not free. Give me your address and let me call you."

"Charlie, I believe you're sober," she said judicially. "I honestly believe he's sober, Dunc. Pinch him and see if he's sober"

Charlie indicated Honoria with his head. They both laughed.

"What's your address?" said Duncan skeptically.

He hesitated, unwilling to give the name of his hotel.

"I'm not settled yet. I'd better call you. We're going to see the vaudeville at the Empire."

"There! That's what I want to do," Lorraine said. "I want to see some clowns and acrobats and jugglers. That's just what we'll do, Dunc."

"We've got to do an errand first," said Charlie. "Perhaps we'll see you there."

"All right, you snob. . . . Good-by, beautiful little girl."

"Good-by."

Honoria bobbed politely.

Somehow, an unwelcome encounter. They liked him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength.

At the Empire, Honoria proudly refused to sit upon her father's folded coat. She was already an individual with a code of her own, and Charlie was more and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized utterly. It was hopeless to try to know her in so short a time.

Between the acts they came upon Duncan and Lorraine in the lobby where the band was playing.

"Have a drink?"

"All right, but not up at the bar. We'll take a table."

"The perfect father."

Listening abstractedly to Lorraine, Charlie watched Honoria's eyes leave their table, and he followed them wistfully about the room, wondering what they saw. He met her glance and she smiled.

"I liked that lemonade," she said.

What had she said? What had he expected? Going home in a taxi afterward, he pulled her over until her head rested against his chest.

"Darling, do you ever think about your mother?"

"Yes, sometimes," she answered vaguely.

"I don't want you to forget her. Have you got a picture of her?"

"Yes, I think so. Aunt Marion has. Why don't you want me to forget her?"

"She loved you very much."

"I loved her too."

They were silent for a moment.

"Daddy, I want to come and live with you," she said suddenly.

His heart leaped; he had wanted it to come like this.

"Aren't you perfectly happy?"

"Yes, but I love you better than anybody. And you love me better than anybody, don't you, now that Mummy's dead?"

"Of course I do. But you won't always like me best, honey. You'll grow up and meet

somebody your own age and go marry him and forget you ever had a daddy.”

“Yes, that’s true,” she said tranquilly.

He didn’t go in. He was coming back at nine o’clock and he wanted to keep himself fresh and new for the thing he must say then.

“When you’re safe inside, just show yourself in that window.”

“All right. Good-by, dads, dads, dads, dads.”

He waited in the dark street until she appeared, all warm and glowing, in the window above, and kissed her fingers out into the night.

III

They were waiting. Marion sat behind the coffee service in a dignified black dinner dress that just faintly suggested mourning. Lincoln was walking up and down with the animation of one who had already been talking. They were as anxious as he was to get into the question. He opened it almost immediately:

“I suppose you know what I want to see you about—why I really came to Paris.”

Marion played with the black stars on her necklace and frowned.

“I’m awfully anxious to have a home,” he continued. “And I’m awfully anxious to have Honoria in it. I appreciate your taking in Honoria for her mother’s sake, but things have changed now”—he hesitated and then continued more forcibly—“changed radically with me, and I want to ask you to reconsider the matter. It would be silly for me to deny that about three years ago I was acting badly—”

Marion looked up at him with hard eyes.

“—but all that’s over. As I told you, I haven’t had more than a drink a day for over a year, and I take that drink deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won’t get too big in my imagination. You see the idea?”

“No,” said Marion succinctly.

“It’s a sort of stunt I set myself. It keeps the matter in proportion.”

“I get you,” said Lincoln. “You don’t want to admit it’s got any attraction for you.”

“Something like that. Sometimes I forget and don’t take it. But I try to take it. Anyhow, I couldn’t afford to drink in my position. The people I represent are more than satisfied with what I’ve done, and I’m bringing my sister over from Burlington to keep house for me, and I want awfully to have Honoria too. You know that even when her mother and I weren’t getting along well we never let anything that happened touch Honoria. I know she’s fond of me and I know I’m able to take care of her and—well, there you are. How do you feel about it?”

He knew that now he would have to take a beating. It would last an hour or two hours, and it would be difficult, but if he modulated his inevitable resentment to the chastened attitude of the reformed sinner, he might win his point in the end.

Keep your temper, he told himself. You don’t want to be justified. You want Honoria.

Lincoln spoke first: “We’ve been talking it over ever since we got your letter last month. We’re happy to have Honoria here. She’s a dear little thing, and we’re glad to be able to help her, but of course that isn’t the question—”

Marion interrupted suddenly. “How long are you going to stay sober, Charlie?” she asked.

“Permanently, I hope.”

ILLUSTRATED BY HENRIETTA MCCAIG JARRETT



"But You Won't Always Like Me Best, Honey. You'll Grow
Up and Meet Somebody Your Own Age and Go Marry Him and Forget You Ever Had a Daddy"

"How can anybody count on that?"

"You know I never did drink heavily until I gave up business and came over here with nothing to do. Then Helen and I began to run around with—"

"Please leave Helen out of it. I can't bear to hear you talk about her like that."

He stared at her grimly; he had never been certain how fond of each other the sisters were in life.

"My drinking only lasted a year and a half—from the time we came over until I—collapsed."

"It was time enough."

"It was time enough," he agreed.

"My duty is entirely to Helen," she said. "I try to think what she would have wanted me to do. Frankly, from the night you did that terrible thing you haven't really existed for me. I can't help that. She was my sister."

"Yes."

"When she was dying she asked me to look out for Honoria. If you hadn't been in a sanatorium then, it might have helped matters."

He had no answer.

"I'll never in my life be able to forget the morning when Helen knocked at my door, soaked to the skin and shivering, and said you'd locked her out."

Charlie gripped the sides of the chair. This was more difficult than he expected; he wanted to launch out into a long expostulation and explanation, but he only said: "The night I locked her out—" and she interrupted, "I don't feel up to going over that again."

After a moment's silence Lincoln said: "We're getting off the subject. You want Marion to set aside her legal guardianship and give you Honoria. I think the main point for her is whether she has confidence in you or not."

"I don't blame Marion," Charlie said slowly, "but I think she can have entire confidence in me. I had a good record up to three years ago. Of course, it's within human possibilities I might go wrong any time. But if we wait much longer I'll lose Honoria's childhood and my chance for a home." He shook his head, "I'll simply lose her, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Lincoln.

"Why didn't you think of all this before?" Marion asked.

"I suppose I did, from time to time, but Helen and I were getting along badly. When I consented to the guardianship, I was flat on my back in a sanatorium and the market had cleaned me out. I knew I'd acted badly, and I thought if it would bring any peace to Helen, I'd agree to anything. But now it's different. I'm functioning, I'm behaving damn well, so far as—"

"Please don't swear at me," Marion said.

He looked at her, startled. With each remark the force of her dislike became more and more apparent. She had built up all her fear of life into one wall and faced it toward him. This trivial reproof was possibly the result of some trouble with the cook several hours before. Charlie became increasingly alarmed at leaving Honoria in this atmosphere of hostility against himself; sooner or later it would come out, in a word here, a shake of the head there, and some of that distrust would be irrevocably implanted in Honoria. But he pulled his temper down out of his face and shut it up inside him; he had won a point, for Lincoln realized the absurdity of Marion's remark and asked her lightly since when she had objected to the word "damn."

"Another thing," Charlie said: "I'm able to give her certain advantages now. I'm going

to take a French governess to Prague with me. I've got a lease on a new apartment—"

He stopped, realizing he was blundering. They couldn't be expected to accept with equanimity the fact that his income was again twice as large as their own.

"I suppose you can give her more luxuries than we can," said Marion. "When you were throwing away money we were living along watching every ten francs. . . . I suppose you'll start doing it again."

"Oh, no," he said. "I've learned. I worked hard for ten years, you know—until I got lucky in the market, like so many people. Terribly lucky. It didn't seem any use working any more, so I quit."

There was a long silence. All of them felt their nerves straining, and for the first time in a year Charlie wanted a drink. He was sure now that Lincoln Peters wanted him to have his child.

Marion shuddered suddenly; part of her saw that Charlie's feet were planted on the earth now, and her own maternal feelings recognized the naturalness of his desire; but she had lived for a long time with a prejudice—a prejudice founded on a curious disbelief in her sister's happiness, and which, in the shock of one terrible night, had turned to hatred for him. It had all happened at a point in her life when the discouragement of ill health and adverse circumstances made it necessary for her to believe in tangible villainy and a tangible villain.

"I can't help what I think!" she cried out suddenly. "How much you were responsible for Helen's death, I don't know. It's something you'll have to square with your own conscience."

An electric current of agony surged through him; for a moment he was almost on his feet, an unuttered echoing in his throat. He hung on to himself for a moment, another moment.

"Hold on there," said Lincoln uncomfortably. "I never thought you were responsible for that."

"Helen died of heart trouble," Charlie said dully.

"Yes, heart trouble." Marion spoke as if the phrase had another meaning for her.

Then, in the flatness that followed her outburst, she saw him plainly and she knew he had somehow arrived at control over the situation. Glancing at her husband, she found no help from him, and as abruptly as if it were a matter of no importance, she threw up the sponge.

"Do what you like!" she cried, springing up from her chair. "She's your child. I'm not the person to stand in your way. I think if it were my child I'd rather see her—" She managed to check herself. "You two decide it. I can't stand this. I'm sick. I'm going to bed."

She hurried from the room; after a moment Lincoln said:

"This has been a hard day for her. You know how strongly she feels—" His voice was almost apologetic: "When a woman gets an idea in her head."

"Of course."

"It's going to be all right. I think she sees now that you—can provide for the child, and we can't very well stand in your way or Honoria's way."

"Thank you, Lincoln."

"I'd better go along and see how she is."

"I'm going."

He was still trembling when he reached the street, but a walk down the Rue Bonaparte to the *quais* set him up, and as he crossed the Seine, fresh and new by the *quai* lamps, he felt exultant. But back in his room he couldn't sleep. The image of Helen haunted him. Helen

whom he had loved so until they had senselessly begun to abuse each other's love, tear it into shreds. On that terrible February night that Marion remembered so vividly, a slow quarrel had gone on for hours. There was a scene at the Florida, and then he attempted to take her home, and then she kissed young Webb at a table; after that there was what she had hysterically said. When he arrived home alone he turned the key in the lock in wild anger. How could he know she would arrive an hour later alone, that there would be a snowstorm in which she wandered about in slippers, too confused to find a taxi? Then the aftermath, and all the attendant horror. They were "reconciled," but that was the beginning of the end, and Marion, who had seen with her own eyes and who imagined it to be one of many scenes from her sister's martyrdom, never forgot.

Going over it again brought Helen nearer, and in the white, soft light that steals upon half sleep near morning he found himself talking to her again. She said that he was perfectly right about Honoria and that she wanted Honoria to be with him. She said she was glad he was being good and doing better. She said a lot of other things—very friendly things—but she was in a swing in a white dress, and swinging faster and faster all the time, so that in the end he could not hear clearly all that she said.

IV

He woke up feeling happy. The door of the world was open again. He made plans, vistas, futures for Honoria and himself, but suddenly he grew sad, remembering all the plans he and Helen had made. She had not planned to die. The present was the thing—work to do and someone to love. But not to love too much, for he knew the injury that a father can do to a daughter or a mother to a son by attaching them too closely: afterward, out in the world, the child would seek in the marriage partner the same blind tenderness and, failing probably to find it, turn against love and life.

It was another bright, crisp day. He called Lincoln Peters at the bank where he worked and asked if he could count on taking Honoria when he left for Prague. Lincoln agreed that there was no reason for deal. One thing—the legal guardianship. Marion wanted to retain that a while longer. She was upset by the whole matter, and it would oil things if she felt that the situation was still in her control for another year. Charlie agreed, wanting only the tangible, visible child.

Then the question of a governess. Charles sat in a gloomy agency and talked to a cross Béarnaise and to a buxom Breton peasant, neither of whom he could have endured. There were others whom he would see tomorrow.

He lunched with Lincoln Peters at Griffons, trying to keep down his exultation.

"There's nothing quite like your own child," Lincoln said. "But you understand how Marion feels too."

"She's forgotten how hard I worked for seven years there," Charlie said. "She just remembers one night."

"There's another thing," Lincoln hesitated. "While you and Helen were tearing around Europe throwing money away, we were just getting along. I didn't touch any of the prosperity because I never got ahead enough to carry anything but my insurance. I think Marion felt there was some kind of injustice in it—you not even working toward the end, and getting richer and richer."

"It went just as quick as it came," said Charlie.

"Yes, a lot of it stayed in the hands of *chasseurs* and saxophone players and *maîtres d'hôtel*—well, the big party's over now. I just said that to explain Marion's feeling about those crazy years. If you drop in about six o'clock tonight before Marion's too tired, we'll settle the details on the spot."

Back at his hotel, Charlie found a *pneumatique* that had been redirected from the Ritz bar where Charlie had left his address for the purpose of finding a certain man.

Dear Charlie: You were so strange when we saw you the other day that I wondered if I did something to offend you. If so, I'm not conscious of it. In fact, I have thought about you too much for the last year, and it's always been in the back of my mind that I might see you if I came over here. We did have such good times that crazy spring, like the night you and I stole the butcher's tricycle, and the time we tried to call on the president and you had the old derby rim and the wire cane. Everybody seems so old lately, but I don't feel old a bit. Couldn't we get together some time today for old time's sake? I've got a vile hang-over for the moment, but will be feeling better this afternoon and will look for you about five in the sweatshop at the Ritz.

*Always devotedly,
Lorraine.*

His first feeling was one of awe that he had actually, in his mature years, stolen a tricycle and pedaled Lorraine all over the Étoile between the small hours and dawn. In retrospect it was a nightmare. Locking out Helen didn't fit in with any other act of his life, but the tricycle incident did—it was one of many. How many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility?

He tried to picture how Lorraine appeared to him then—very attractive; Helen was unhappy about it, though she said nothing. Yesterday, in the restaurant, Lorraine had seemed trite, blurred, worn away. He emphatically did not want to see her, and he was glad Alix had not given away his hotel address. It was a relief to think, instead, of Honoria, to think of Sundays spent with her and of saying good morning to her and of knowing she was there in his house at night, drawing her breath in the darkness.

At five he took a taxi and bought presents for all the Peters—a piquant cloth doll, a box of Roman soldiers, flowers for Marion, big linen handkerchiefs for Lincoln.

He saw, when he arrived in the apartment, that Marion had accepted the inevitable. She greeted him now as though he were a recalcitrant member of the family, rather than a menacing outsider. Honoria had been told she was going; Charlie was glad to see that her tact made her conceal her excessive happiness. Only on his lap did she whisper her delight and the question "When?" before she slipped away with the other children.

He and Marion were alone for a minute in the room, and on an impulse he spoke out boldly:

"Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules. They're not like aches or wounds; they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal because there's not enough material. I wish you and I could be on better terms."

"Some things are hard to forget," she answered. "It's a question of confidence." There

was no answer to this and presently she asked: "When do you propose to take her?"

"As soon as I can get a governess. I hoped the day after to-morrow."

"That's impossible. I've got to get her things in shape. Not before Saturday."

He yielded. Coming back into the room, Lincoln offered him a drink.

"I'll take my daily whiskey."

It was warm here, it was home, people together by a fire. The children felt very safe and important; the mother and father were serious, watchful. They had things to do for the children more important than his visit here. A spoonful of medicine was, after all, more important than the strained relations between Marion and himself. They were not dull people, but they were very much in the grip of life and circumstances. He wondered if he couldn't do something to get Lincoln out of his rut at the bank.

A long peal at the door-bell; the *bonne à tout faire* passed through and went down the corridor. The door opened upon another long ring, and then voices, and the three in the salon looked up expectantly; Richard moved to bring the corridor within his range of vision, and Marion rose. Then the maid came back along the corridor, closely followed by the voices, which developed under the light into Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarries.

They were gay, they were hilarious, they were roaring with laughter. For a moment Charlie was astounded; unable to understand how they ferreted out the Peters' address.

"Ah-h-h!" Duncan wagged his finger roguishly at Charlie. "Ah-h-h!"

They both slid down another cascade of laughter. Anxious and at a loss, Charlie shook hands with them quickly and presented them to Lincoln and Marion. Marion nodded, scarcely speaking. She had drawn back a step toward the fire; her little girl stood beside her, and Marion put an arm around her shoulder.

With growing annoyance at the intrusion, Charlie waited for them to explain themselves. After some concentration Duncan said:

"We came to invite you out to dinner. Lorraine and I insist that all this chi-chi, cagy business 'bout your address got to stop."

Charlie came closer to them, as if to force them backward down the corridor.

"Sorry, but I can't. Tell me where you'll be and I'll phone you in half an hour."

This made no impression. Lorraine sat down suddenly on the side of a chair, and focusing her eyes on Richard, cried, "Oh, what a nice little boy! Come here, little boy." Richard glanced at his mother, but did not move. With a perceptible shrug of her shoulders, Lorraine turned back to Charlie:

"Come and dine. Sure your cousins won' mine. See you so sel'om. Or solemn."

"I can't," said Charlie sharply. "You two have dinner and I'll phone you."

Her voice became suddenly unpleasant. "All right, we'll go. But I remember once when you hammered on my door at four a.m. I was enough of a good sport to give you a drink. Come on, Dunc."

Still in slow motion, with blurred, angry faces, with uncertain feet, they retired along the corridor.

"Good night," Charlie said.

"Good night!" responded Lorraine emphatically.

When he went back into the salon Marion had not moved, only now her son was standing in the circle of her other arm. Lincoln was still swinging Honoria back and forth like a pendulum from side to side.

"What an outrage!" Charlie broke out. "What an absolute outrage!"

Neither of them answered. Charlie dropped into an armchair, picked up his drink, set it down again and said:

"People I haven't seen for two years having the colossal nerve—"

He broke off. Marion had made the sound "Oh!" in one swift, furious breath, turned her body from him with a jerk and left the room.

Lincoln set down Honoria carefully.

"You children go in and start your soup," he said, and when they obeyed, he said to Charlie:

"Marion's not well and she can't stand shocks. That kind of people make her really physically sick."

"I didn't tell them to come here. They wormed your name out of somebody. They deliberately—"

"Well, it's too bad. It doesn't help matters. Excuse me a minute."

Left alone, Charlie sat tense in his chair. In the next room he could hear the children eating, talking in monosyllables, already oblivious to the scene between their elders. He heard a murmur of conversation from a farther room and then the tinkling bell of a telephone receiver picked up, and in a panic he moved to the other side of the room and out of earshot.

In a minute Lincoln came back. "Look here, Charlie. I think we'd better call off dinner for tonight. Marion's in bad shape."

"Is she angry with me?"

"Sort of," he said, almost roughly. "She's not strong and—"

"You mean she's changed her mind about Honoria?"

"She's pretty bitter right now. I don't know. You phone me at the bank tomorrow."

"I wish you'd explain to her I never dreamed these people would come here. I'm just as sore as you are."

"I couldn't explain anything to her now."

Charlie got up. He took his coat and hat and started down the corridor. Then he opened the door of the dining room and said in a strange voice, "Good night, children."

Honoria rose and ran around the table to hug him.

"Good night, sweetheart," he said vaguely, and then trying to make his voice more tender, trying to conciliate something, "Good night, dear children."

V

Charlie went directly to the Ritz bar with the furious idea of finding Lorraine and Duncan, but they were not there, and he realized that in any case there was nothing he could do. He had not touched his drink at the Peters', and now he ordered a whiskey-and-soda. Paul came over to say hello.

"It's a great change," he said sadly. "We do about half the business we did. So many fellows I hear about back in the States lost everything, maybe not in the first crash, but then in the second. Your friend George Hardt lost every cent, I hear. Are you back in the States?"

"No, I'm in business in Prague."

"I heard you lost a lot in the crash."

"I did," and he added grimly, "but I lost everything I wanted in the boom."

"Selling short."

"Something like that."

Again the memory of those days swept over him like a nightmare—the people they had met traveling; then people who couldn't add a row of figures or speak a coherent sentence. The little man Helen had consented to dance with at the ship's party, who had insulted her ten feet from the table; the women and girls carried screaming with drink or drugs out of public places—

—The men who locked their wives out in the snow, because the snow of twenty-nine wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money.

He went to the phone and called the Peters' apartment; Lincoln answered.

"I called up because this thing is on my mind. Has Marion said anything definite?"

"Marion's sick," Lincoln answered shortly. "I know this thing isn't altogether your fault, but I can't have her go to pieces about it. I'm afraid we'll have to let it slide for six months; I can't take the chance of working her up to this state again."

"I see."

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

He went back to his table. His whiskey glass was empty, but he shook his head when Alix looked at it questioningly. There wasn't much he could do now except send Honoria some things; he would send her a lot of things tomorrow. He thought rather angrily that this was just money—he had given so many people money . . .

"No, no more," he said to another waiter. "What do I owe you?"

He would come back some day; they couldn't make him pay forever. But he wanted his child, and nothing was much good now, beside that fact. He wasn't young anymore, with a lot of nice thoughts and dreams to have by himself. He was absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone.





Judih Haggai

back on track
sleep all night
his shoulder on mine

* * *

Big plans
jump outa bed
forget to touch ground

* * *

walk with me
another forest home
calls us back

* * *

on the way
from inside a soft cloud
towards a gentler ground

* * *

new voice in head
gentle chant
everywhere i go

* * *

rice paper screens
slightly parted
scene revealed

* * *

skull exposed
my face no longer
isn't life strange

* * *

all night rain
drums on rooftops
tadpoles in garden

* * *

too quiet the night
no noise from the neighbour
alone to ponder

* * *

night cradle
rock a slow samba
until dawn

* * *

i see the light
so very focused
till i wake up

* * *

dogs bark
directly into window
early Saturday

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

What is Bags End? A Reader's Guide Part 2: 2004-2014

*The second part of this essay delves into the Bags End myth in more recent years,
to elaborate on both its continuity with earlier years, & its development.*

1. In March 2003, I boarded a Greyhound bus in Seattle, Washington, arriving several days later in Hartford, Connecticut, met at the bus station by my dear friend Jim. I then stayed for a year with my friend Gerry, his apartment luckily having an unused second bedroom. I had no money, my heart was broken, felt like a failure.

For the next year I slowly got my shit together. Let go the romance that had crushed me under foot, eventually found my beloved Kassi, who saw worth & good in me that I did not. Still does.

Beginning with food bank & Food Stamps, & my friend not charging me for rent, I eventually found income & more solid ground. To the topic here, I kept writing *Bags End News*, but it was a slow process. What was Bags End now to me? Mostly, memories of earlier years, living with my family, making up stories with my sister Christine. The later delight in the '90s of reading the tales at Jellicle Literary Guild meetings. Being back in Connecticut, where Bags End & I had both originated, did not help in finding its path forward as an entity. Yet I felt its worth as deep as ever.

2. In April 2004, I boarded a Greyhound bus in Hartford, Connecticut, arriving several days later in Seattle, Washington. Stayed with my friend Sean initially, till eventually I moved in with, & eventually married, Kassi. We moved down to Portland, Oregon in September

2007, & back East to metro-Boston (which I'd left in 2002) in July 2010.

For all the years I lived out West, the actual 3 bags of Bags End were stored (with most of my possessions) in a U-Haul storage space in New Britain, Connecticut. Only Algernon Beagle traveled with me. What's funny is that when I left the East in 2004, Bags End had a past but no discernible future. By when I returned from the West in 2010, new ideas had come & I was fully ready to move forward.

3. Benny Big Dreams: This is where the renewed way forward began, with a character who originally appeared in my new fixtion *Why?* [2005-2006]. Benny is a big, bald, muscular man with many tattoos; he is an oneironaut, a traveler in dreams, dweller in Dreamland (though apparently not a native, it later turns out). Algernon finds him a sometimes tricky but usually loyal traveling companion.

Algernon's first adventure involving Benny occurs when he can't seem to wake up; Dreamland "sticks" to him repeatedly & he encounters one Dream Bags End after the next. What he learns is the one travels to it via lucid ("looser," as he calls it) dreams, & that it exists independently of any one individual. This idea, rudimentarily drawn here, of many iterations of one thing, becomes more important as the story goes on.

4. Dreamland seems to exist on the border of Bags End's neighbor Imagianna. Princess Chrisakah points to a hill distant from her castle, & tells Algernon "it's over there." On the, or an, other side of Bags End is a newly discovered place called the Creature Common. From Bags End itself, the way to the Creature Common is via falling into lucid dream, walking through Dream Bags End, finding the picture of the bare-footed red-haired girl (Marie) in the forest clearing with her faeries, closing one's eyes, forgetting it's a picture, & stepping on through. Where once Bags End's neighbors were simply Oz, Narnia, Neverland, the Hundred Acre Wood, & the River, mentioned in the stories but rarely visited, these newer neighbors are frequently part of the Bags End tales.
5. Larry the Spider, black & orange with glittery eyes, becomes Algernon's first friend from the Creature Common. They meet as Algernon is again trying to escape Dreamland's long-lasting hold on him. Algernon is struggling to wake up, to find both continuity & novelty in himself. (Both he & I were.)

Larry shows Algernon the Marie picture & explains its unique importance. It is the portal back to their waking homes for both of them. They figure out that Benny Big Dreams needs help, & thus Algernon's stuckedness & perhaps the reason he meets Larry. Algernon & Larry travel a long way to a strange Temple in the White Woods, whose trees are asleep. Challenged by a strange little imp (more on her later) to defend Benny & wake the Beast of the Woods, thus waking the trees, Algernon stands tall on his short legs, wakes the Beast, wakes the trees, & he himself finally wakes up.

In these later adventures (slow in the composing: the first Benny Big Dreams story took all of 2005 to write; the Larry the Spider story began in 2006 in Seattle, was written through

2007-2010 in Portland, & concluded in Boston in 2010), the Bags End mythology opens up in previously unimagined ways, to Dreamland, to the Creature Common, & eventually even to a re-envisioned depiction of the common world of people-folk.

6. From Bags End's perspective, the Creature Common is where live an uncertain number of generally friendly little souls, not dissimilar to Bags End friends themselves, but less prone to fights & fracas. The Creatures of the Dream are entertainers of the traveling carnival & vaudeville sort, & put on Grand Productions of entertainment, often during the Season of Lights in December, & to which they invite all the Bags End friends. Previously unknown to any, it is via Algernon Beagle's stories in *Bags End News* that their ways become told.

It is via *Bags End News* too that relations of this cluster of neighboring lands—including Dreamland & Imagianna too—gets elaborated. I wanted these creations—ranging in conception from the late '70s to the early 2000s—to dwell together now, move forward with fresh currency.

7. There are no paths in the White Woods. And they are prone to bamboozle a visitor endlessly—unless he has the right song. Similar in spirit to the “songlines” that guide Indigenous Australians in following the paths of their ancestors, created during the Dreaming, one needs to sing the right song to travel the White Woods successfully from point A to point B.

Like Benny Big Dreams, the White Woods originated in my *Why?* fixation. I wrote *Why?* in 2005 &, like the Bags End stories of the same time, it was a kind of reboot for its story sequence. Mysterious, sometimes malevolent (think of the woods in *Twin Peaks*) in this story & others in its series (*Things Change [Six Thresholds]* & *Labyrinthine*), but not quite so much in the Bags End mythology. More “tricky” (as Algernon Beagle says) than dangerous.

8. Princess Chrisakah was once named Christina. As a child, she'd had dreams of climbing through a hole in her bedroom wall to visit a magical underground land (think of *Fraggle Rock*) where she made many friends among those who lived there. One particular friend, Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, has become her life-long companion.

Eventually Crissy lives with Boop in a city & goes to school. Then she gets a job. She takes care of Algernon for a while, via a request in dream from his Mommy Beagle. Then things go bad for her, & she has to give up Algernon. Benny Big Dreams promises to take care of him.

Crissy writes storybooks about her childhood adventures that gain a fanatical audience who see her as someone with all the answers. She stops writing, things get worse for her & Boop, & finally she accepts her destiny as Guardian of Bags End & other places. She & Boop move to Imagianna & live there for good. She changes her name from Christina to Chrisakah. Eventually, Crissy tells this story to Algernon for him to write in his newspaper, but there is still more about herself for her to learn too.

Into my current fixtion, *Labyrinthine*, came a girl named Christina. Within my current poetry series, *Many Musics*, The Tangled Gate myth features a princess who visits in dreams her friends who live through the hole in her bedroom wall. And another iteration of that Princess in those poems lives with Boop & Algernon, writes books, & eventually becomes Guardian of Bags End & other worlds. The more I open the borders of my various creations to mixing & mingling, the deeper & subtler each of them gets.

9. Imagianna seems to have been created solely for Princess Crissy & Boop to live in. Borders Dreamland; I'm not sure what this signifies.

The Castle is also strange in that its rooms & hallways sometimes come & go, dissimilar to Bags End's that seem to be stable.

Algernon often comes to visit & Boop, Crissy's servant, will insist he be greeted properly in the Throne Room. So Crissy puts on her princess dress over her t-shirt & blue jeans, & goes through the introduction protocols. Then she will leap up & hug Algernon but good.

They will then go to her bedroom to dance around to R.E.M. records, or maybe to her Secret Room full of cushions & purple lights; or to read from the storybooks she used to write; or possibly outside to the oak tree where they sit together & share a dream.

Boop might return to his Composing Chamber where he is writing a grand epic of his people. Later he will join Crissy & Algernon on a hill that is especially good for viewing the full moon.

Like almost all places connected to Bags End, Imagianna is reached by finding the right level & stepping through the correct door. The door is visible from Imagianna only upon passage from one place to the other. There could be more to this than I know now.

10. Boop's people live, as other Creatures do, in the caves & tunnels beneath The Tangled Gate, on the Island. They are peaceful & happy, & don't go above ground much, so little know it exists.

Then Christina's people come from the far-off world Emandia through the Dreaming via The Tangled Gate to these caves & tunnels, refugees from their dying world. At first they are scared & do little in this place new to them. Eventually they decide to explore, to find a life for themselves.

They leave Christina, who is small, with the not-turtles. The Red Bag by which they traveled is left untouched. Christina has only a green & gold box of paints & pencils & paper & musical instruments to remember them by.

Eventually Christina's travels in the Gate take her so far away that when she finally returns it is though she is a new visitor. She visits nightly, but only in dreams, & eventually Boop goes to live with her in her apartment in the city. They have Algernon too with them, & go

to movies together on Saturdays.

When Crissy agrees to help create Bags End & be its Guardian (& other worlds), Boop insists she take on the role of Princess, & he be her servant. He knows that those that are protected are often small, & need the assurance of someone confident & brave. They live together in their Castle, & are happy.

Inspired by helping Algernon to write his newspaper, doing reviews of the Royal Thumbs' Production of *The Stories of the Four Pictures*, Boop creates his own Composing Chamber, as Crissy has hers too, & begins to write his epic.

11. Betsy Bunny Pillow has been battling Farmer Jones for control of the Bunny Pillow Farm for years, & occasionally corners Algernon Beagle into writing down her memoirs (what he calls her "lie-ography"). Brung to her secret clubhouse by her mysterious "Allies," Algernon will have to endure hours of tall tales about day-long battles & sieges, all the while knowing her real story is just as heroic.

Then Betsy hears that the Creature Common has a yellow pillow named Dorris who she doesn't know but who Algernon likes a lot. Soft but not grumpy. Betsy demands a meeting with this pillow. Similarly, Sheila Bunny had demanded to meet MeZmer the White Bunny, but that encounter had concluded peaceably with friendly sniffings & hoppings.

This one looks like all-out war, as Betsy cannot accept that her arch-enemy Farmer Jones has been defeated but remains on the Farm to help the pillows continue growing new ones. Algernon & Dorris arrive to Betsy pummeling Jones, & only Dorris's magic saves the man.

Then Dorris reveals herself to one of the Architects of the Bunny Pillow Farm. She explains that she & Betsy & the others are "dream pillows," meant to calm & comfort people-folk. Dorris wants Betsy to give up her battles & help Jones & the other pillows on this mission of Dream Pillows to help cause peace in the world. The outcome remains uncertain.

12. Farmer Jones was once an idealist young man selected by Dorris & the other Architects (including, it is revealed, Betsy's Allies) to run the Bunny Pillow—or perhaps the less Betsy-centric—Dream Pillow Farm. But he grew frustrated over the years that peace did not come to the world. He left the Farm, looking for people-folk help, but was tricked by a bad rich guy & forced to sell the pillows only to rich people.

Jones grows old, forgets his ideals, worries only to protect the Farm. By when Betsy comes along, he is an angry & bitter man. Thus Betsy wars against him. Now Dorris comes, the Architects having decided to step in, & she brings the hope that the Farm can find its way back to its original vision.

The Bunny/Dream Pillow Farm story is one my proudest efforts so far at having these various places crisscross narratively. Like the various groups in *Fraggle Rock*, these lands all need each other.



13. Rosa!eeta is a tiny little cackling imp, in the form of what Algernon calls a “pandy bear.” She first appears during Algernon’s & Larry’s travels to help Benny wake the White Woods, demanding to know what Algernon will give for dreams. “All!” he cries, & that satisfies her.

Then she is featured in the 2011 Grand Production *Cackle! Cackle! Cackle! A Shenanigans Fantastika!* Grand Productions are produced by the Royal Thumbs whose Productions create all the shows. The MC for all the shows is a white bear with jaunty black hat & Scotch-style scarf named Xavier, or just X. This Production elaborates on Rosa!eeta’s past & importance. She helps several times to gather the Creatures together (carnival, vaudeville, Common), inspired, as is Threshold, the Lead Lead Creature, by how & what Bags End is. A “hero” to them.

Rosa!eeta is a Tender, like MeZmer & Dorris & others. Tenders, in Algernon’s words, “ease a guy’s heart-bone.” Very needed, as often Creatures have been cold, or on the run, lonely, worried, & these things haunt them.

But she is also an imp, full of her shenanigans. In sum, clever tricks & games. Algernon accepts her ways, except in dire times, when he will demand her clear answers & help. Though he is used to tricky guys, she is much trickier than the rest. She is one imp, no imps, many imps, an elaborate version of the earlier story.

14. Clover-dale is a strange, old, & uninhabited half-fallen-down farmhouse, based on a real place in Vermont. Like the White Woods & Benny Big Dreams, it has appeared in *Labyrinthine* & *Many Musics* as well.

Uninhabited & yet not empty. Upon entering, one discovers a room full of dusty mirrors, each of which depicts the viewer in a unique way. Very old, very young, as a Creature, as the Beast, among others. More than distortions of glass: *alternatives*. Algernon, Sheila, & Crissy, during an epic expedition to discover why they are all dreaming of rain in an empty Bags End, travel by BunnyCycle deep into the White Woods, find the old rabbit warren of Sheila’s family, & travel it into Clover-dale.

The mirror room leads to a room each experience alone. Algernon encounters his long-lost Mommy Beagle; Crissy a friend from a time when she had none; & Sheila her long-unseen sister, the Bunny Star. When the three friends reunite, they soon find themselves back in Bags End.

What Sheila also recalls, in one of the mirrors, is how this was where she first saw her purple eyes & had a unique sense of identity & self-consciousness. What eventually led her & her family from living as wild rabbits in the White Woods to living as languaged denizens of Bags End.

15. Mommy Beagle’s actual name is not yet known, though I think it starts with an A. For a long time it was only known that she lived in Peoria, Illinois, & Algernon misses her. But on the expedition to discover the why of the dream of rain, Algernon encounters her twice.

First, as a sort of trick of the White Woods when Benny tries to help Algernon & the rest. Algernon doesn't fall for it. But then in Clover-dale, he sees her, & she's the real one.

They have a strange conversation in which she tells him she is partly stuck in Clover-dale, & so lives there some of the time, & that he lived here too long ago, before she sent him to Chrisakah.

Like Chrisakah & Imagianna, this was another old Bags End story I wanted to do more with, & even the few pages devoted to this brings it along new, with more to come.

16. Another old story is that of the Bunny Star. The Bunny Star hops close on nights when Miss Chris, Ramie, & the Bags End friends read storybooks on the front steps of Miss Chris's house. But now is told more of her story, why she's up there, what she is.

We learn that she is Sheila's sister, & that on the night her family left for Bags End, she chose instead to live up in the stars. She takes Sheila into the stars, even to places where only stars can go. There they get to watch Creature Stars dance & perform, versions of those who live in the Creature Common (one, none, many).

17. The Rabbit Warren that leads to Clover-dale is where Sheila & her family are from. They leave it sometime after Sheila accidentally stumbles into Clover-dale & looks in the mirror. Something happens, because of her purple eyes? Because of the mirror? Perhaps both? How do they go from the Warren to Bags End? What is it like when they arrive? This is certainly an untold story, waiting its turn. Maybe the Warren itself is also part of the equation. The carrots they eat. Like Bunny/Dream Pillows, these bunnies evolve & their story on-goes.

18. One important thing that connects the Island, White Woods, & Creature Common is that their denizens sniff for answers, warnings, information. Even language-loving Algernon learns to sniff as he & Sheila & Crissy travel deeper into the White Woods. It fascinates him, to communicate, to learn, without words. Algernon calls it a "different way of thinking."

I've heard it said that the sense of smell is our oldest. And it powerfully affects us in a way unique from the other senses, & from language. It would make sense that animal-shaped beings would retain importantly this gift. People-folk have it too, but less wield it than animals. Seems a big loss.

19. Before there were Royal Thumbs Productions to entertain Bags End, & share with their new friends in the Creature Common, there was *The Sheila Show*. I guess it was sort of a variety talent show, occurring every Saturday night in the Bags End Auditorium. Not much description of it in *Bags End News* to go on. Just a neat concept, mostly developed.

More developed is Royal Thumbs Productions. Meister Thumb traveled with Rosaleta long ago, in a jalopy, during hard times. To keep his spirits up, Rosaleta would sing funny songs to him. Eventually, they build a stage, & travel town to town performing in open fields. This seems to lead eventually to X's Carnival of Fantastic Wonders & Marvels, which draws

many talented Creatures (dancing bears, a jumping chimpanzee, a joke-telling Dalmatian, the White Bunny, among many others) to join & travel together. Many good times.

Again, hard times, & the Carnival breaks up. Yet many of the Creatures end up together again in Vaudeville times at a theater Meister & Brother Thumb rent in the big city. Many good times again until the Depression brings it all to an end. Again, diaspora, until Rosaleeta & Threshold bring it all together (over time) at the Creature Common.

Thus the *Cackle! Cackle! Cackle!* Grand Production mentioned earlier. Another, *Tangled Gate*, is Crissy's first new story in a long time, with its finale of dancing, tumbling Creatures, & the debut of high-wire trapeze artiste extraordinaire, La Petite Thumb. The most recent, *The Stories of the Four Pictures*, tells of how a group of little colored books Crissy found in a long jacket in her Castle leads an uncertain man to find the purpose of his life in what he does after it.

The Grand Productions are shown in the Bags End Auditorium as well a great long clearing deep in the White Woods. Sometimes take place in dreams; sometimes the audience seems impossibly in the middle of the action.

And *The Sheila Show*? When it returns, it will be going for ambition I could not have imagined back when.

20. Sheila says to Algernon after seeing *Cackle! Cackle! Cackle!*: "There's no them & us, is there?" Algernon agrees. This is a crucial moment in the mythology. I did not want the newer Creature Common to supplant the older Bags End, but I had to find the bridge.

The answer was simple when it came: they are neighbors, they share adventures, crisscross in every way I can think of. *Bags End News'* masthead from issue #324 (5/22/2010; last one begun in Portland) includes "Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle." Thus Algernon knows then what Sheila understands six months later: no them & us.

The *Dream of Rain* story concludes with Ramie, Sheila, & Crissy passing all the Bags End friends through a picture to the Creature Common, safely, till the rain that had flooded Bags End dries. Also to watch a Grand Production. Algernon notices Bags End is now located in a corner of the Creature Common, on a chair. Additionally to a corner of Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. One, none, many. Peasy easy, as the imp might say.

No them & us. Works good for people-folk too, when we try it. Other way never works, no matter the number or kinds of try.

21. It was about 2012 when the three brown bags of Bags End when joined by a fourth, a red bag. As Miss Chris says in the *What is the Red Bag?* story sequence, it's so "all will fit." Like the others, there has to be a story.

It began in late 2011, in *The Tangled Gate* sequence of *Many Musics*. I took the old Greek

myth of the Labyrinth & Ariadne & the Minotaur & the thread, & I mixed in my own flavorings & obsessions, removed what didn't fit, & found myself with a 36-poem sequence I liked.

As has been said, the Red Bag is a portal, built on Emandia, intended to instantly transport some of its inhabitants to safety before their planet dies. So it's here & there simultaneously. Crissy learns this story & many years later writes a story based on it. Benny Big Dreams reads her story & decides to replicate a Red Bag for Dreamland (there one arrives to a bedroom). Others end up in Bags End (where it looks like a reddish-tinged hallway with a door at the far end) & Imagianna (where it looks like Crissy's old city apartment where she types her stories).

The Red Bag, one, none, & many, was created in Emandia to help & that's what it does.\

22. "The Tangled Gate" is my stories' name for the Labyrinth on the Island. Its legend reads "*For Those Lost*" & just within is a Fountain insisting a drink (likely mildly psychotropic), & then one follows various paths through high walls made of stones & vines. All sorts of things dwell within the Gate, including Creatures under it, a Beast in a Cave, the White Woods, Clover-dale, a strange desert, on & on.

So Algernon enters through the door at the end of the Red Bag level, & uses the colored threads Crissy gives him to guide him along & back. He meets a real Princess (non sorta-kinda like Crissy) but his thread runs low, & he decides to retreat.

Bags End News, *Many Musics*, & *Labyrinthine* have all spent hundreds of pages on the Island & in The Tangled Gate. Eternal, source of the world, original home to the Creatures, it seems without limits to the number of their stories. Which makes me happy.

23. Back when she was older, Chrisakah was Christina who lived in the city for a while & wrote books about a place she dreamed about as a child. Real enough to have gifted her Boop, her best buddy. But she didn't recall the whole of the story.

Christina's books were very popular, so much so that many readers felt her some kind of guru-genius who could solve the pains & struggles of their lives. Obsessed on her, to the point that she began to look for a way out of her life. *She knew* she was no guru-genius.

By chance, if chance ye believe in, Crissy found her way back to The Tangled Gate, through the Red Bag she discovered in the back of her friend Nat Perfect's newsstand. He taught her about how to use the box of colored threads she'd found on his shelves, to navigate the Gate.

And for a long time she was happy traveling its many paths, free of other needs or obligations, always returning through the Red Bag to the back of Nat's store in what seemed about two minutes after she left. Then she broke her promise to Nat & used the black thread. Something happened when she entered the Cave of the Beast. Two things. She came out

with magic she hadn't had. And she didn't write again until years later when Algernon drug her back to The Tangled Gate to finish her story. Which she didn't—writing a new story instead. She could now protect her friends living under the Gate, & have her memories.

The two Crissy stories Algernon has written about in *Bags End News* are “The Red Bag” & “The Tangled Gate.” That means there are many more yet to hear.

24. Crissy is Guardian of Bags End & yet rarely comes there. How does she guard it? And from what? I find if I mull on questions like these long enough, what sensibly sums to answers emerges. When a story has some of its pieces, & there's enthusiasm to ask more questions, & know more answers, they will come. If really good answers, they will gestate more questions.

The current story going (Sept-Dec 2014) has to do with Crissy's sister. As she is a version of the Princess who lives on the Island, she must have a sister like the rest. But in the other versions, they came from Emandia through space, landed in the ocean, were brought to the Island by a passing boat. Crissy comes with others first to the Great Cavern below The Tangled Gate. Where was her sister in this instance? I don't know yet.

This story will be passing through The Tangled Gate to arrive at the Great Cavern. Perhaps to a pursuit of those who came with Crissy. Where did they go? All sorts of maybes. One, or a combination, will emerge, will become the answer. Fit, if it/they make sense. Gestate new questions, as said, if good.

25. In the original Greek myth of the Labyrinth, at least most versions, Princess Ariadne gives the hero Theseus a thread to use in navigating the Labyrinth safely. The idea being that, without it, he & the other tributes to Ariadne's father, King Minos of Crete, would become lost in the Labyrinth, & eventually found by the Minotaur, & eaten.

I changed the one thread in that story to a box of a dozen different colored threads in mine, each offering different guidance or direction. Only five have been specified so far:

- **Black** – to the Beast
- **Green** – recover something dear
- **Crimson** – for greater understanding
- **Purple** – wish to heal
- **White** – back to Gate

The first time Algernon navigates The Tangled Gate in the *What is the Red Bag?* sequence, he is given the White thread by Princess Crissy, & wisely returns to the door to the Red Bag when the thread runs low.

Crissy had not been so careful in her past days when she returned to The Tangled Gate via Nat Perfect's store & the Red Bag. She cleverly braids the threads together to travel farther, but does not keep her promise to him not to use the black one. Though it is unclear what happens when she enters the Cave of the Beast (“There was a gnattering laugh” indicates

an imp present), it is clearly a move she now regrets. More may be revealed in time about all this.

26. How did Princess Chrisakah first come to Bags End? Within the stories, for many years, she simply had always been around. Lived in the Castle in Imagianna with her friend Boop, was kind of a tomboy but very nice & well-liked in Bags End. Her magic, what Algernon calls her “tricky smile magic,” seems to involve no spells or tools. She doesn’t use it terribly often or other than to protect Bags End. Her life as Christina is behind her, as she cannot return to the common world of people-folk. She seems pretty happy overall &, having resumed her writing, now often of Grand Productions, she has from her old life all she wanted.

Maybe there will be there will be a crisis, or a challenge, or situations where her “tricky smile magic” does not help or apply. I don’t know. I also don’t know how she relates to the Christina of *Labyrinthine*. Will other inhabitants of the Castle or Imagianna be revealed? To be determined.

27. The Great Cavern under The Tangled Gate has been the setting often, in the Bags End stories, *Labyrinthine*, & *Many Musics*. It might be that the caves & tunnels that surround the Great Cavern are a sort of underground equivalent of The Tangled Gate above.

The questions regarding the Great Cavern has to do with its many denizens. Boop & his fellow not-turtles have been in it a long time, as well as many Creatures. For a time, Christina & her fellow Emandians find refuge there before, without Christina, they move on, leaving only her & the Red Bag.

There seem to be two main exits: one through the Cave of the Beast outside to the Gate; the other which is shrouded by the Fountain near the Gate’s entrance.

What else is there to the Great Cavern with its many caves & tunnels? Do others live there? What did the Emandians discover, such that they never returned? Are there tunnels leading deeper into the earth, as well as to the surface? There’s surely more to know.

28. Among the Creatures there are those called Tenders who, as noted earlier, “ease a guy’s heartbone.” Dorris the yellow Dream Pillow is one; MeZmer the White Bunny is another; Rosleeta is too. Dorris & Rosaleeta are semi-retired; MeZmer is the active Tender & she has two apprentices: Angelique, a little bear with wings; & Ringling, a striped White Tiger

Each Tender also has a “boon companion”: Rosaleeta has a strange old long-bearded man named Fitz; MeZmer, a small grey hedgehog named Holly; Dorris, two bouncy pillows named Billo & Trillo; Angelique, the Dalmatian Henry; & Ringling the green-eyed bullfrog Fredine.

Algernon & the other Bags End friends will get to know these Creatures better over time. There will be more comings & goings. Just as Bags End’s longer-time-known neighbors

Imagianna & the Bunny/Dream Pillow Farm have had their effects on Bags End, so too will the Creature Common. I am learning how to do this still. What it means for Bags End to have this wider context.

Perhaps sometime I will also write stories that involve Oz, Narnia, Wonderland, the Hundred Acre Wood, & other classic fantasylands. How to do this without it seeming like a pastiche is a challenge. I think it's a matter of *deeply believing* the characters & their stories. Feeling their realness as much as the chair I sit in now, the air I breathe, the music in my ears, this pen, this paper. When this works for me or for others, it's pretty amazing.

29. The Bags End mythology began as the story of Miss Chris, her toy tall boy brother Ramie, & her friends who lived in Bags End on a chair in the corner of her bedroom. It was modeled on the Oz books, the Pooh books, & their like, which I've mentioned often in this guide. Bags End I'd guess began around 1978 when Christine was small & I was reading *The Hobbit* as well. So then till about 1985 it was tales we told each other. I didn't write down very much of it.

When I left home in 1985, the mythology became a newspaper continuing its existence that way. The primary audience changed, dwindled. I remained Ramie in the stories but became Raymond in my own life as I reached & traveled adulthood.

In the *Stories of the Four Pictures* sequence, I made a crucial decision. One, none, many. I broke me into several pieces. Ramie is 17, a Lazybug, lives with Miss Chris & their family in Connecticut, she is five.

Another part of me traveled far & wide, met many people, experienced a great deal. Met a bear on a stairs landing in an old boarding house I was living in, was gifted a sack of little blank books with many different colored covers. Found an old overcoat on his travels, it had many pockets to hold the little books safely. Eventually came to a festival in the mountains, a great nighttime bonfire, danced all night, & died before dawn.

Traveled on more easily now, in search of what would fill the books. Met Rosa!eeta the imp who in a darkened dwelling showed him the man who would tell the stories of the four pictures hanging on the wall in the hallway outside his bedroom. The dead Traveler would arrange for him to find the books here & there over time, & would live in the four pictures in the form of an "itch" to the man's thoughts, inspiring him to tell story after story of a group of Travelers, their Creature companions, & their many strange adventures.

And thus the Author would nightly tell the stories to an armful of interested Creatures, & write down the stories he told in the little books. As it turns out, the Author & his beloved Lady live in a place where the Creature Common has come to be. And when Algernon & the other Bags End friends learn of & visit the Creature Common, all are connected. And Crissy, denizen of Imagianna, writes the Grand Production that details all of this. Some of it taking place in Dreamland, to boot.



Part of me is still Ramie; part of me is the Traveler who traveled dark & bright roads, died at a mountain festival many years ago; & part of me is the Author who tells the stories of the four pictures, the itch inspiring me. My lives & times from long ago & recently are thus able to co-exist one & all.

30. The colored books, called the Secret Books, exist in the Author's possession but also are found by Princess Crissy in a long overcoat in one of the occasional rooms of her Castle. Their shifting text is eventually decoded by Crissy, Algernon, & their friends, by reading them in full moonlight while cluster dreaming atop the hill near Crissy's Castle. It is discovered that Rosaleeta is playing one of her games with the little books.

Like the Red Bag, versions of the same thing are not themselves the same. I tend to think that Crissy's collection of Secret Books is not quite the same as the Author's. Thus how they will play into new stories is unknown.

The long overcoat & the books have also been in *Labyrinthine* & *Many Musics*. These books' depths have in no way been reached.

31. Is Bags End located on or adjacent to the Island? Its new Red Bag's far door opens directly into The Tangled Gate, as though one of its many paths terminates there. The Gate is on the Island, atop its hill, near the Castle, Tower, Dancing Grounds. So thus it seems that, via the Red Bag, the Island, The Tangled Gate & that near it, & the White Woods are all neighbors to Bags End, via a doorway. This is new, since the Red Bag being Bags End's fourth Bag is new.
32. The Bags End tales have rarely been published. A sequence of them appeared in a 1992 zine *Sixes and Sevens*, published by G.C. Dillon, Jim Gregory, & me. (The illustrations to these stories were reprinted in Part 1 of this guide.) At JG meetings in the 1990s, I read many of the stories.

Wanting to circulate them again, since I was reinventing them for new work, in 2012 I began reading the stories on my weekly radio show *Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution* (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>). Starting with "Revolt at the Toy Store!" from 1986, I've worked my way selectively through stories up through 1990. It's a fun & good thing to do. They read well aloud, on microphone. Algernon's funny accented voice gives them their spicy kick. I think, beginning in 2015, some of the reading will be of the older stories but I might also spend stretches of shows reading the post-2004 stories as well.

33. The masthead of issue #324 (5/22/2010) includes Threshold Puggle credited as "Lead Lead Creature," to match Sheila Bunny credited as "King" (which she isn't save by her own grumpy say-so). For a few recent issues during *The Stories of the Four Pictures* sequence, Boop was credited as "Apprentice Reporter" while he helped Algernon & even wrote some Grand Production reviews. Princess Crissy has been a Guest Editor, as has Godd the little pink bear.

Threshold's addition, however, was a permanent one & signaled a visible bond between Bags End & the Creature Common. Maybe it's because the Creature Common doesn't have its own newspaper (save, obscurely, the Secret Books). But shouldn't then Crissy be listed as "Princess" & Benny Big Dreams as "Tricky Oneironautical Guy"? Even Dorris as "One of the Architects of the Dream Pillow Farm," & who-knows-who(s) as representing the Island, Tangled Gate, White Woods?

Best I can say is that the part of my mind common with Algernon doesn't always know his motivations. And so cannot foresee what's to come. I like this, I think.

34. As mentioned in Part 1, since the 1985-1988 weekly run of *Bags End News*, 151 issues, the frequency of publication has gone up and down with the passing years. Up through 2008, it was very few per year, long gaps between. The *Algernon Beagle Wakes Up!* sequence covered 5 issues written over 2005. The *What Remains Builds the Next Thing*, introducing Larry the Spider & the Creatures, ran 7 issues written from late 2006 to early 2010.

It was in 2010, when we moved back to Boston, when I had all the *Bags End News* notebooks & Bags End itself was in my home, when the novelty of the Creature Common was revivifying the stories, that production began to rise again.

I can't write *Bags End News* 52 issues a year as I did in 1986 & 1987. Too many other projects. But what has come to pass, instead, is a compromise: 15 issues a year. This started in 2010, & 2014 will be the fifth year this target has been reached. Like how the *Doctor Who* serials of old became the 13-part seasons currently running, I had to find a new structure to house the re-envisioned narrative within.

Like the Jellicle Literary Guild, once 8 meetings yearly, now 4; *The Cenacle*, once 8 issues a year, now 4; my desire to publish RaiBooks twice a year but at least once; resume Burning Man Books after a 6-year hiatus; continue my radio show, & *Scriptor Press Sampler*; & push on in *Many Musics* & *Labyrinthine*; so too I'll reserve an area of my time & creative mind for *Bags End News*. The issues tend to run September to December, which gives me many months to gestate ideas, to ready. Perhaps like a TV show, in a way, there's readying time & there's production time. It's worked for 5 years now & my intent is that it work on & on.

That all said, next year is *Bags End News*' 30th anniversary in June. There may just be a bonus double-issue. Next year *Bags End News* will also cross the 400-issue mark.

35. The Season of Lights holiday, as mentioned in Part 1, has lain dormant for the most part. Most recently figured in the *What Remains Builds the Next* sequence as part of the finale. There is a giant tree in the Great Cavern that traces through old Bags End tales to the Tangled Gate mythos.

I have now a version of the tree in my home. My version is metal, but it is tall & will be decorated with many ornaments, & I think when the next Grand Production occurs, it will

be part of it, along with candles, & Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* music. Creatures, Bags End friends, The Tangled Gate, White Woods, Dreamland, Imagianna, Bunny/Dream Pillow Farm. Oz, Narnia, Wonderland, & so on. A night, near to winter solstice, when all come together to share the delight of Art & Friendship.

36. *Notes from New England* has been part of *The Cenacle* since 1998 (#24-25). I use it variously from issue to issue. I try to fill it with new pages of writing that stick hard, that matter to me. Hence, the yearly *Dream Raps*, the tribute to J.D. Salinger a few years back, the piece about newly living in a purchased house.

The last of these helped my thinking for this guide. I can't explain Bags End in a linear way, can't even do it fully & finally in a non-linear way. But I can start somewhere & branch out, this way, that way, till a tree is outlined, then a few, a Woods, a Gate, an Island. Or four bags, one of them red. Apartment building kinda-looking within.

I can say: read the 390 issues (& counting) & learn it that way. I wrote them; I've read through them again & again for this guide. But the problem more is that they are not published anywhere. Just 16 volumes (& counting) of notebooks, black ink on blue-lined sheets.

The weekly readings on *Within's Within* began a renewed effort to find a way to circulate more widely these stories, as least as much as *Many Musics* & *Labyrinthine*, their kin. Beginning in April 2015, *Cenacle* 92, the Bags End mythology will be joining these other projects as a regular feature of these pages. Funny, too, because the issue marks *The Cenacle's* 20th anniversary, shortly followed by *Bags End News's* 30th anniversary in June.

How to do this? Transfer a hand-written newspaper to a quarterly published journal? I'm mulling it. Writing this guide has helped me to explain better to myself, as well as firstly to new readers, what Bags End is. How it's changed, how it hasn't. How my ragged years have formed it, & how this mythology has balmed me to the passing of years, its gains & losses.

So this is a prelude. Once it's finished, edited, typed, published with the rest of *The Cenacle*, I'll be resuming the current story Algernon Beagle is telling of the search for Princess Crissy's lost sister. The story will be affected by this guide, the voyage of re-discovery it's been. I've stepped back to look at the whole, paused writing, & read & read. When I resume writing it will be with lots of exciting new ground to cover. *I can't wait!*

12/19/2014
Melrose, MA


* * * * *



Tom Sheehan**Excursion**

December gave us both a gray day,
thick as hardpan, sitting-down thick,
a neutral sadness running pole to pole,
a day that cried for work or laughter.

Work wins out, I told son James,
barely three and barely to my thigh.
I dressed him for the full adventure;
gloves soft as strung rabbit's neck,

stocking cap puffed out of lamb,
jacket thick with duck's outside,
a twist of blue knotting under chin,
two-ply boots denser than a tire.

Jamie leaned penguinish, starchy tight,
not quite sure of feet or balance point,
where the fulcrum of his day angled,
what could tip him this way or that.

I sat him, nugget of a boy, deep in the van
among chainsaw, rip ax, six-pound maul,
and the pair of blunt wedges I had worn
feverishly down through full reams of trees.

Oh, James likes iron, how it calls attention
to itself, hidden core ringing at his feet,
the hard touch remembered on cold days,
surfaces demanding the sweat of hands.

He likes iron forcing its way in or through,
iron beating on or back in brittle echoes,
that sprouts handles and odd points
and sharp edges; iron changing shapes

Of shapes, moving together or ever apart,
iron crying for the sweet will of muscle.
James comes bountied to move earth,
to carve pieces to his wanting, his need.

He comes magnetic. Tools move to him,
are drawn by his hands, heart's thirst,
shoulder coming poised behind the ingot,
with the shaking that little boys give off.

Some monger's fire simmers in his eyes;
his lungs have bellow burst, puff of dream.
A dynamo hums in him, sings, trembles
down the limbs he brings to tasks,

a flywheel set in motion, gearage grab.
He clanged and banged and rang aloud
in the back of the van, echoing himself
among harsh tools, rang hard as them,

wavered as a tuning fork to day's wand,
gave me in the driver's seat fair music
of the shop, beat of the forge at fire,
early shape of man in the ringing light

of coming on to size, pig iron breakout
 from the harvest of heat, furnace essence,
 the brazier soul coming through a sense
 of fire, son where the welding works.

Oh, we bend here in a parade of tasks,
 endless marching to orders we are born
 ever to obey, the expense of our energies.
 Each of us must light his own ample fire,

as James must light his. Failure is here,
 not burning off the energy, not using up
 all the waiting ghost that resides within.
 Now James, my son, comes beside me

moving up in time, rattling with tools
 he will spend his life with or always at,
 the promise of something Excalibured,
 the deeply driven driven out or drawn.

The hunger swell that swells some souls
 must swell in him. At length he will move
 the mountain in the way, will bend keen
 tool edge on the steepest edge of Earth

as he moves Authurian in his life. But then
 we came at last to dream and destination;
 a wide field, a thick butt of maple tree,
 monarch dropped along the avenue,

once the carrier of a hundred fallen nests,
 donned a thousand rains, worst of storms,
 wore scars of lightning zippered on its bark.
 Into this field was brought tree's death.

And we come, James and I, to scavenge,
 to pick as ants, gulls, or high vultures
 what is left of the dying or the dead;
 a father and son looting what is left

of the maple's being, faint yellow core.
 A pair of deed-takers, two men of tools,
 making hard music of twin cutters
 as I whipped my saw into quick frenzy.

It loves good wood, slab of thick hides,
 the inner rings hundreds high and counting.
 James held his ground, the maul too heavy
 to lift but handle operable as rudder stick,

able to steer the day to someplace on.
 His eyes measured all three feet down
 into the butt the saw's cut would hasten,
 blinked at the majestic toss of sawdust

and chips hosing out beneath rapid chain,
 figuring what it takes to earn the saw,
 how much tool it was, what its sound meant
 in a field where our maple died some more.

* * * * *



The Search for the Manchurian Candidate: The CIA, Mind Control, & LSD

[Essay]

Excerpted from The Search for the Manchurian Candidate, Times Books, 1979.

Albert Hofmann's discovery of LSD in 1943 may have begun a new age in the exploration of the human mind, but it took six years for word to reach America. Even after Hofmann and his coworkers in Switzerland published their work in a 1947 article, no one in the United States seemed to notice. Then in 1949, a famous Viennese doctor named Otto Kauders traveled to the United States in search of research funds. He gave a conference at Boston Psychopathic Hospital,¹ a pioneering mental-health institution affiliated with Harvard Medical School, and he spoke about a new experimental drug called d-lysergic acid diethylamide. Milton Greenblatt, the hospital's research director, vividly recalls Kauders' description of how an infinitesimally small dose had rendered Dr. Hofmann temporarily "crazy."

"We were very interested in anything that could make someone schizophrenic," says Greenblatt. If the drug really did induce psychosis for a short time, the Boston doctors reasoned, an antidote—which they hoped to find—might cure schizophrenia. It would take many years of research to show that LSD did not, in fact, produce a "model psychosis," but to the Boston doctors in 1949, the drug showed incredible promise. Max Rinkel, a neuropsychiatrist and refugee from Hitler's Germany, was so intrigued by Kauders' presentation that he quickly contacted Sandoz, the huge Swiss pharmaceutical firm where Albert Hofmann worked. Sandoz officials arranged to ship some LSD across the Atlantic.

The first American trip followed. The subject was Robert Hyde, a Vermont-born psychiatrist who was Boston Psychopathic's number-two man. A bold, innovative sort, Hyde took it for granted that there would be no testing program until he tried the drug. With Rinkel and the hospital's senior physician, H. Jackson DeShon looking on, Hyde drank a glass of water with 100 micrograms of LSD in it—less than half Hofmann's dose, but still a hefty jolt. DeShon describes Hyde's reaction as "nothing very startling." The perpetually active Hyde insisted on making his normal hospital rounds while his colleagues tagged along. Rinkel later told a scientific conference that Hyde became "quite paranoid, saying that we had not given him anything. He also berated us and said the company had cheated us, given us plain water. That was not Dr. Hyde's normal behavior; he is a very pleasant man." Hyde's first experience was hardly as dramatic as Albert Hofmann's, but then the Boston psychiatrist had not, like Hofmann, set off on a voyage into the complete unknown.

For better or worse, LSD had come to America in 1949 and had embarked on a strange trip of its own. Academic researchers would study it in search of knowledge that would benefit all mankind. Intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA, would subsidize and shape the form of much of this work to learn how the drug could be used to break the will of enemy agents,

unlock secrets in the minds of trained spies, and otherwise manipulate human behavior. These two strains—of helping people and of controlling them—would co-exist rather comfortably through the 1950s. Then, in the 1960s, LSD would escape from the closed world of scholar and spy, and it would play a major role in causing a cultural upheaval that would have an impact both on global politics and on intimate personal beliefs. The trip would wind up—to borrow some hyperbole from the musical *Hair*—with “the youth of America on LSD.”

The counterculture generation was not yet out of the nursery, however, when Bob Hyde went tripping: Hyde himself would not become a secret CIA consultant for several years. The CIA and the military intelligence agencies were just setting out on their quest for drugs and other exotic methods to take possession of people’s minds. The ancient desire to control enemies through magical spells and potions had come alive again, and several offices within the CIA competed to become the head controllers. Men from the Office of Security’s ARTICHOKE program were struggling—as had OSS before them—to find a truth drug or hypnotic method that would aid in interrogation. Concurrently, the Technical Services Staff (TSS) was investigating in much greater depth the whole area of applying chemical and biological warfare (CBW) to covert operations.

TSS was the lineal descendent of Stanley Lovell’s Research and Development unit in OSS, and its officials kept alive much of the excitement and urgency of the World War II days when Lovell had tried to bring out the Peck’s Bad Boy in American scientists. Specialists from TSS furnished backup equipment for secret operations: false papers, bugs, taps, suicide pills, explosive seashells, transmitters hidden in false teeth, cameras in tobacco pouches, invisible inks, and the like. In later years, these gadget wizards from TSS would become known for supplying some of history’s more ludicrous landmarks, such as Howard Hunt’s ill-fitting red wig; but in the early days of the CIA, they gave promise of transforming the spy world.

Within TSS, there existed a Chemical Division with functions that few others—even in TSS—knew about. These had to do with using chemicals (and germs) against specific people. From 1951 to 1956, the years when the CIA’s interest in LSD peaked, Sidney Gottlieb, a native of the Bronx with a Ph.D. in chemistry from Cal Tech, headed this division. (And for most of the years until 1973, he would oversee TSS’s behavioral programs from one job or another.) Only 33 years old when he took over the Chemical Division, Gottlieb had managed to overcome a pronounced stammer and a clubfoot to rise through Agency ranks.

Described by several acquaintances as a “compensator,” Gottlieb prided himself on his ability, despite his obvious handicaps, to pursue his cherished hobby, folk dancing. On returning from secret missions overseas, he invariably brought back a new step that he would dance with surprising grace. He could call out instructions for the most complicated dances without a break in his voice, infecting others with enthusiasm. A man of unorthodox tastes, Gottlieb lived in a former slave cabin that he had remodeled himself—with his wife, the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries in India, and his four children. Each morning, he rose at 5:30 to milk the goats he kept on his 15 acres outside Washington. The Gottliebs drank only goat’s milk, and they made their own cheese. They also raised Christmas trees which they sold to the outside world.

Greatly respected by his former colleagues, Gottlieb, who refused to be interviewed for this book, is described as a humanist, a man of intellectual humility and strength, willing to carry out, as one ex-associate puts it, “the tough things that had to be done.” This associate fondly recalls, “When you watched him, you gained more and more respect because he was

willing to work so hard to get an idea across. He left himself totally exposed. It was more important for us to get the idea than for him not to stutter.” One idea he got across was that the Agency should investigate the potential use of the obscure new drug, LSD, as a spy weapon.

At the top ranks of the Clandestine Services (officially called the Directorate of Operations but popularly known as the “dirty tricks department”), Sid Gottlieb had a champion who appreciated his qualities, Richard Helms. For two decades, Gottlieb would move into progressively higher positions in the wake of Helms’ climb to the highest position in the Agency. Helms, the tall, smooth “preppie,” apparently liked the way the Jewish chemist, who had started out at Manhattan’s City College, could thread his way through complicated technical problems and make them understandable to nonscientists. Gottlieb was loyal and he followed orders. Although many people lay in the chain of command between the two men, Helms preferred to avoid bureaucratic niceties by dealing directly with Gottlieb.

On April 3, 1953, Helms proposed to Director Allen Dulles that the CIA set up a program under Gottlieb for “covert use of biological and chemical materials.” Helms made clear that the Agency could use these methods in “present and future clandestine operations” and then added, “Aside from the offensive potential, the development of a comprehensive capability in this field . . . gives us a thorough knowledge of the enemy’s theoretical potential, thus enabling us to defend ourselves against a foe who might not be as restrained in the use of these techniques as we are.” Once again, as it would throughout the history of the behavioral programs, defense justified offense. Ray Cline, often a bureaucratic rival of Helms, notes the spirit in which the future Director pushed this program: “Helms fancied himself a pretty tough cookie. It was fashionable among that group to fancy they were rather impersonal about dangers, risks, and human life. Helms would think it sentimental and foolish to be against something like this.”

On April 13, 1953—the same day that the Pentagon announced that any U.S. prisoner refusing repatriation in Korea would be listed as a deserter and shot if caught—Allen Dulles approved the program, essentially as put forth by Helms. Dulles took note of the “ultra-sensitive work” involved and agreed that the project would be called MKULTRA.² He approved an initial budget of \$300,000, exempted the program from normal CIA financial controls, and allowed TSS to start up research projects “without the signing of the usual contracts or other written agreements.” Dulles ordered the Agency’s bookkeepers to pay the costs blindly on the signatures of Sid Gottlieb and Willis Gibbons, a former U.S. Rubber executive who headed TSS.

As is so often the case in government, the activity that Allen Dulles approved with MKULTRA was already under way, even before he gave it a bureaucratic structure. Under the code name MKDELTA, the Clandestine Services had set up procedures the year before to govern the use of CBW products. (MKDELTA now became the operational side of MKULTRA.) Also in 1952, TSS had made an agreement with the Special Operations Division (SOD) of the Army’s biological research center at Fort Detrick, Maryland whereby SOD would produce germ weapons for the CIA’s use (with the program called MKNAOMI).

Sid Gottlieb later testified that the purpose of these programs was “to investigate whether and how it was possible to modify an individual’s behavior by covert means. The context in which this investigation was started was that of the height of the Cold War with the Korean War just winding down; with the CIA organizing its resources to liberate Eastern Europe by paramilitary means; and with the threat of Soviet aggression very real and tangible, as



exemplified by the recent Berlin airlift” (which occurred in 1948).

In the early days of MKULTRA, the roughly six TSS professionals who worked on the program spent a good deal of their time considering the possibilities of LSD.³ “The most fascinating thing about it,” says one of them, “was that such minute quantities had such a terrific effect.” Albert Hofmann had gone off into another world after swallowing less than 1/100,000 of an ounce. Scientists had known about the mind-altering qualities of drugs like mescaline since the late nineteenth century, but LSD was several thousand times more potent. Hashish had been around for millennia, but LSD was roughly a million times stronger (by weight). A two-suiter suitcase could hold enough LSD to turn on every man, woman, and child in the United States.

“We thought about the possibility of putting some in a city water supply and having the citizens wander around in a more or less happy state, not terribly interested in defending themselves,” recalls the TSS man. But incapacitating such large numbers of people fell to the Army Chemical Corps, which also tested LSD and even stronger hallucinogens. The CIA was concentrating on individuals. TSS officials understood that LSD distorted a person’s sense of reality, and they felt compelled to learn whether it could alter someone’s basic loyalties. Could the CIA make spies out of tripping Russians—or vice versa? In the early 1950s, when the Agency developed an almost desperate need to know more about LSD, almost no outside information existed on the subject. Sandoz had done some clinical studies, as had a few other places, including Boston Psychopathic, but the work generally had not moved much beyond the horse-and-buggy stage. The MKULTRA team had literally hundreds of questions about LSD’s physiological, psychological, chemical, and social effects. *Did it have any antidotes? What happened if it were combined with other drugs? Did it affect everyone the same way? What was the effect of doubling the dose?* And so on.

TSS first sought answers from academic researchers who, on the whole, gladly cooperated and let the Agency pick their brains. But CIA officials realized that no one would undertake a quick and systematic study of the drug unless the Agency itself paid the bill. Almost no government or private money was then available for what had been dubbed “experimental psychiatry.” Sandoz wanted the drug tested, for its own commercial reasons, but beyond supplying it free to researchers, it would not assume the costs. The National Institutes of Mental Health had an interest in LSD’s relationship to mental illness, but CIA officials wanted to know how the drug affected normal people, not sick ones. Only the military services, essentially for the same reasons as the CIA, were willing to sink much money into LSD, and the Agency men were not about to defer to them. They chose instead to take the lead—in effect to create a whole new field of research.

Suddenly there was a huge new market for grants in academia, as Sid Gottlieb and his aides began to fund LSD projects at prestigious institutions. The Agency’s LSD pathfinders can be identified: Bob Hyde’s group at Boston Psychopathic; Harold Abramson at Mt. Sinai Hospital and Columbia University in New York; Carl Pfeiffer at the University of Illinois Medical School; Harris Isbell of the NIMH-sponsored Addiction Research Center in Lexington, Kentucky; Louis Jolyon West at the University of Oklahoma; and Harold Hodge’s group at the University of Rochester.

The Agency disguised its involvement by passing the money through two conduits: the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, a rich establishment institution which served as a cutout (intermediary) only for a year or two, and the Geschickter Fund for Medical Research, a

Washington, D.C. family foundation, whose head, Dr. Charles Geschickter, provided the Agency with a variety of services for more than a decade. Reflexively, TSS officials felt they had to keep the CIA connection secret. They could only “assume,” according to a 1955 study, that Soviet scientists understood the drug’s “strategic importance” and were capable of making it themselves. They did not want to spur the Russians into starting their own LSD program or into devising countermeasures.

The CIA’s secrecy was also clearly aimed at the folks back home. As a 1963 Inspector General’s report stated, “Research in the manipulation of human behavior is considered by many authorities in medicine and related fields to be professionally unethical”; therefore, openness would put “in jeopardy” the reputations of the outside researchers. Moreover, the CIA Inspector General declared that disclosure of certain MKULTRA activities could result in “serious adverse reaction” among the American public.

At Boston Psychopathic, there were various levels of concealment. Only Bob Hyde and his boss, the hospital superintendent, knew officially that the CIA was funding the hospital’s LSD program from 1952 on, to the tune of about \$40,000 a year. Yet, according to another member of the Hyde group, Dr. DeShon, all senior staff understood where the money really came from.

“We agreed not to discuss it,” says DeShon. “I don’t see any objection to this. We never gave it to anyone without his consent and without explaining it in detail.” Hospital officials told the volunteer subjects something about the nature of the experiments but nothing about their origins or purpose. None of the subjects had any idea that the CIA was paying for the probing of their minds and would use the results for its own purposes; most of the staff was similarly ignorant.

Like Hyde, almost all the researchers tried LSD on themselves. Indeed, many believed they gained real insight into what it felt like to be mentally ill, useful knowledge for health professionals who spent their lives treating people supposedly sick in the head. Hyde set up a multidisciplinary program—virtually unheard of at the time—that brought together psychiatrists, psychologists, and physiologists. As subjects, they used each other, hospital patients, and volunteers—mostly students—from the Boston area. They worked through a long sequence of experiments that served to isolate variable after variable.

Palming themselves off as foundation officials, the men from MKULTRA frequently visited to observe and suggest areas of future research. One Agency man, who himself tripped several times under Hyde’s general supervision, remembers that he and his colleagues would pass on a nugget that another contractor like Harold Abramson had gleaned and ask Hyde to perform a follow-up test that might answer a question of interest to the Agency. Despite these tangents, the main body of research proceeded in a planned and orderly fashion. The researchers learned that while some subjects seemed to become schizophrenic, many others did not. Surprisingly, true schizophrenics showed little reaction at all to LSD, unless given massive doses.

The Hyde group found out that the quality of a person’s reaction was determined mainly by the person’s basic personality structure (set), and the environment (setting) in which he or she took the drug. The subject’s expectation of what would happen also played a major part. More than anything else, LSD tended to intensify the subject’s existing characteristics—often to extremes. A little suspicion could grow into major paranoia, particularly in the company of people perceived as threatening.

Unbeknownst to his fellow researchers, the energetic Dr. Hyde also advised the CIA on using LSD in covert operations. A CIA officer who worked with him recalls: “The idea would be to give him the details of what had happened [with a case], and he would speculate. As a sharp M.D. in the old-school sense, he would look at things in ways that a lot of recent bright lights couldn’t get He had a good sense of make-do.”

The Agency paid Hyde for his time as a consultant, and TSS officials eventually set aside a special MKULTRA subproject as Hyde’s private funding mechanism. Hyde received funds from yet another MKULTRA subproject that TSS men created for him in 1954, so he could serve as a cutout for Agency purchases of rare chemicals. His first buy was to be \$32,000 worth of corynanthine, a possible antidote to LSD, that would not be traced to the CIA.

Bob Hyde died in 1976 at the age of 66, widely hailed as a pacesetter in mental health. His medical and intelligence colleagues speak highly of him both personally and professionally. Like most of his generation, he apparently considered helping the CIA a patriotic duty. An Agency officer states that Hyde never raised doubts about his covert work. “He wouldn’t moralize. He had a lot of trust in the people he was dealing with [from the CIA]. He had pretty well reached the conclusion that if they decided to do something [operationally], they had tried whatever else there was and were willing to risk it.”

Most of the CIA’s academic researchers published articles on their work in professional journals, but those long, scholarly reports often gave an incomplete picture of the research. In effect, the scientists would write openly about how LSD affects a patient’s pulse rate, but they would tell only the CIA how the drug could be used to ruin that patient’s marriage or memory. Those researchers who were aware of the Agency’s sponsorship seldom published anything remotely connected to the instrumental and rather unpleasant questions the MKULTRA men posed for investigation.

That was true of Hyde and of Harold Abramson, the New York allergist who became one of the first Johnny Appleseeds of LSD by giving it to a number of his distinguished colleagues. Abramson documented all sorts of experiments on topics like the effects of LSD on Siamese fighting fish and snails,⁴ but he never wrote a word about one of his early LSD assignments from the Agency.

In a 1953 document, Sid Gottlieb listed subjects he expected Abramson to investigate with the \$85,000 the Agency was furnishing him. Gottlieb wanted “operationally pertinent materials along the following lines: a. Disturbance of Memory; b. Discrediting by Aberrant Behavior; c. Alteration of Sex Patterns; d. Eliciting of Information; e. Suggestibility; f. Creation of Dependence.”

Dr. Harris Isbell, whose work the CIA funded through Navy cover with the approval of the Director of the National Institutes of Health, published his principal findings, but he did not mention how he obtained his subjects. As Director of the Addiction Research Center at the huge Federal drug hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, he had access to a literally captive population. Inmates heard on the grapevine that if they volunteered for Isbell’s program, they would be rewarded either in the drug of their choice or in time off from their sentences. Most of the addicts chose drugs—usually heroin or morphine of a purity seldom seen on the street. The subjects signed an approval form, but they were not told the names of the experimental drugs or the probable effects. This mattered little, since the “volunteers” probably would have granted their informed consent to virtually anything to get hard drugs.

Given Isbell’s almost unlimited supply of subjects, TSS officials used the Lexington

facility as a place to make quick tests of promising but untried drugs, and to perform specialized experiments they could not easily duplicate elsewhere. For instance, Isbell did one study for which it would have been impossible to attract student volunteers. He kept seven men on LSD for 77 straight days.⁵ Such an experiment is as chilling as it is astonishing—both to lovers and haters of LSD.

Nearly 20 years after Dr. Isbell's early work, counterculture journalist Hunter S. Thompson delighted and frightened his readers with accounts of drug binges lasting a few days, during which Thompson felt his brain boiling away in the sun, his nerves wrapping around enormous barbed wire forts, and his remaining faculties reduced to their reptilian antecedents. Even Thompson would shudder at the thought of 77 days straight on LSD, and it is doubtful he would joke about the idea.

To Dr. Isbell, it was just another experiment. "I have had seven patients who have now been taking the drug for more than 42 days," he wrote in the middle of the test, which he called "the most amazing demonstration of drug tolerance I have ever seen." Isbell tried to "break through this tolerance" by giving triple and quadruple doses of LSD to the inmates.

Filled with intense curiosity, Isbell tried out a wide variety of unproven drugs on his subjects. Just as soon as a new batch of scopolamine, rivea seeds, or bufotenine arrived from the CIA or NIMH, he would start testing. His relish for the task occasionally shone through the dull scientific reports. "I will write you a letter as soon as I can get the stuff into a man or two," he informed his Agency contact.

No corresponding feeling shone through for the inmates, however. In his few recorded personal comments, he complained that his subjects tended to be afraid of the doctors and were not as open in describing their experiences as the experimenters would have wished. Although Isbell made an effort to "break through the barriers" with the subjects, who were nearly all black drug addicts, Isbell finally decided "in all probability, this type of behavior is to be expected with patients of this type." The subjects have long since scattered, and no one apparently has measured the after-effects of the more extreme experiments on them.

One subject who could be found spent only a brief time with Dr. Isbell. Eddie Flowers was 19 years old and had been in Lexington for about a year when he signed up for Isbell's program. He lied about his age to get in, claiming he was 21. All he cared about was getting some drugs. He moved into the experimental wing of the hospital where the food was better and he could listen to music. He loved his heroin but knew nothing about drugs like LSD. One day he took something in a graham cracker. No one ever told him the name, but his description sounds like it made him trip—badly, to be sure. "It was the worst shit I ever had," he says. He hallucinated and suffered for 16 or 17 hours. "I was frightened. I wouldn't take it again."

Still, Flowers earned enough "points" in the experiment to qualify for his "payoff" in heroin. All he had to do was knock on a little window down the hall. This was the drug bank. The man in charge kept a list of the amount of the hard drug each inmate had in his account. Flowers just had to say how much he wanted to withdraw and note the method of payment. "If you wanted it in the vein, you got it there," recalls Flowers who now works in a Washington, D.C. drug rehabilitation center.

Dr. Isbell refuses all request for interviews. He did tell a Senate subcommittee in 1975 that he inherited the drug payoff system when he came to Lexington and that "it was the custom in those days The ethical codes were not so highly developed, and there was a

great need to know in order to protect the public in assessing the potential use of narcotics I personally think we did a very excellent job.”

For every Isbell, Hyde, or Abramson who did TSS contract work, there were dozens of others who simply served as casual CIA informants, some witting and some not. Each TSS project officer had a skull session with dozens of recognized experts several times a year. “That was the only way a tiny staff like Sid Gottlieb’s could possibly keep on top of the burgeoning behavioral sciences,” says an ex-CIA official. “There would be no way you could do it by library research or the Ph.D. dissertation approach.” The TSS men always asked their contacts for the names of others they could talk to, and the contacts would pass them on to other interesting scientists.

In LSD research, TSS officers benefited from the energetic intelligence gathering of their contractors, particularly Harold Abramson. Abramson talked regularly to virtually everyone interested in the drug, including the few early researchers not funded by the Agency or the military, and he reported his findings to TSS. In addition, he served as reporting secretary of two conference series sponsored by the Agency’s sometime conduit, the Macy Foundation.

These series each lasted over five-year periods in the 1950s; one dealt with “Problems of Consciousness” and the other with “Neuropharmacology.” Held once a year in the genteel surroundings of the Princeton Inn, the Macy Foundation conferences brought together TSS’s (and the military’s) leading contractors, as part of a group of roughly 25 with the multidisciplinary background that TSS officials so loved. The participants came from all over the social sciences, and included such luminaries as Margaret Mead and Jean Piaget. The topics discussed usually mirrored TSS’s interests at the time, and the conferences served as a spawning ground for ideas that allowed researchers to engage in some healthy cross-fertilization.

Beyond the academic world, TSS looked to the pharmaceutical companies as another source on drugs—and for a continuing supply of new products to test. TSS’s Ray Treichler handled the liaison function, and this secretive little man built up close relationships with many of the industry’s key executives. He had a particular knack for convincing them he would not reveal their trade secrets. Sometimes claiming to be from the Army Chemical Corps and sometimes admitting his CIA connection, Treichler would ask for samples of drugs that were either highly poisonous or, in the words of the one-time director of research of a large company, “caused hypertension, increased blood pressure, or led to other odd physiological activity.”

Dealing with American drug companies posed no particular problems for TSS. Most cooperated in any way they could. But relations with Sandoz were more complicated. The giant Swiss firm had a monopoly on the Western world’s production of LSD until 1953. Agency officials feared that Sandoz would somehow allow large quantities to reach the Russians. Since information on LSD’s chemical structure and effects was publicly available from 1947 on, the Russians could have produced it any time they felt it worthwhile. Thus, the Agency’s phobia about Sandoz seems rather irrational, but it unquestionably did exist.

On two occasions early in the Cold War, the entire CIA hierarchy went into a dither over reports that Sandoz might allow large amounts of LSD to reach Communist countries. In 1951 reports came in through military channels that the Russians had obtained some 50 million doses from Sandoz. Horrendous visions of what the Russians might do with such a stockpile circulated in the CIA, where officials did not find out the intelligence was false for several years. There was an even greater uproar in 1953 when more reports came in, again

through military intelligence, that Sandoz wanted to sell the astounding quantity of 10 kilos (22 pounds) of LSD—enough for about 100 million doses—on the open market.

A top-level coordinating committee which included CIA and Pentagon representatives unanimously recommended that the Agency put up \$240,000 to buy it all. Allen Dulles gave his approval, and off went two CIA representatives to Switzerland, presumably with a black bag full of cash. They met with the president of Sandoz and other top executives. The Sandoz men stated that the company had never made anything approaching 10 kilos of LSD and that, in fact, since the discovery of the drug 10 years before, its total production had been only 40 grams (about 1 1/2 ounces).⁶ The manufacturing process moved quite slowly at that time because Sandoz used real ergot, which could not be grown in large quantities. Nevertheless, Sandoz executives, being good Swiss businessmen, offered to supply the U.S. Government with 100 grams weekly for an indefinite period, if the Americans would pay a fair price. Twice the Sandoz president thanked the CIA men for being willing to take the nonexistent 10 kilos off the market. While he said the company now regretted it had ever discovered LSD in the first place, he promised that Sandoz would not let the drug fall into communist hands.

The Sandoz president mentioned that various Americans had in the past made “covert and sideways” approaches to Sandoz to find out about LSD, and he agreed to keep the U.S. government informed of all future production and shipping of the drug. He also agreed to pass on any intelligence about Eastern European interest in LSD. The Sandoz executives asked only that their arrangement with the CIA be kept “in the very strictest confidence.”

All around the world, the CIA tried to stay on top of the LSD supply. Back home in Indianapolis, Eli Lilly & Company was even then working on a process to synthesize LSD. Agency officials felt uncomfortable having to rely on a foreign company for their supply, and in 1953 they asked Lilly executives to make them up a batch, which the company subsequently donated to the government.

Then, in 1954, Lilly scored a major breakthrough when its researchers worked out a complicated 12- to 15-step process to manufacture first lysergic acid (the basic building block) and then LSD itself from chemicals available on the open market. Given a relatively sophisticated lab, a competent chemist could now make LSD without a supply of the hard-to-grow ergot fungus.

Lilly officers confidentially informed the government of their triumph. They also held an unprecedented press conference to trumpet their synthesis of lysergic acid, but they did not publish for another five years their success with the closely related LSD.

TSS officials soon sent a memo to Allen Dulles, explaining that the Lilly discovery was important because the government henceforth could buy LSD in “tonnage quantities,” which made it a potential chemical-warfare agent. The memo writer pointed out, however, that from the MKULTRA point of view, the discovery made no difference since TSS was working on ways to use the drug only in small-scale covert operations, and the Agency had no trouble getting the limited amounts it needed. But now the Army Chemical Corps and the Air Force could get their collective hands on enough LSD to turn on the world.

Sharing the drug with the Army here, setting up research programs there, keeping track of it everywhere, the CIA generally presided over the LSD scene during the 1950s. To be sure, the military services played a part and funded their own research programs.⁷ So did the National Institutes of Health, to a lesser extent.

Yet both the military services and the NIH allowed themselves to be co-opted by the CIA—as funding conduits and intelligence sources. The Food and Drug Administration also supplied the Agency with confidential information on drug testing. Of the Western world’s two LSD manufacturers, one—Eli Lilly—gave its entire (small) supply to the CIA and the military. The other—Sandoz—informed Agency representatives every time it shipped the drug.

If somehow the CIA missed anything with all these sources, the Agency still had its own network of scholar-spies, the most active of whom was Harold Abramson, who kept it informed of all new developments in the LSD field. While the CIA may not have totally cornered the LSD market in the 1950s, it certainly had a good measure of control—the very power it sought over human behavior.

Sid Gottlieb and his colleagues at MKULTRA soaked up pools of information about LSD and other drugs from all outside sources, but they saved for themselves the research they really cared about: operational testing. Trained in both science and espionage, they believed they could bridge the huge gap between experimenting in the laboratory and using drugs to outsmart the enemy.

Therefore the leaders of MKULTRA initiated their own series of drug experiments that paralleled and drew information from the external research. As practical men of action, unlimited by restrictive academic standards, they did not feel the need to keep their tests in strict scientific sequence. They wanted results now—not next year. If a drug showed promise, they felt no qualms about trying it out operationally before all of the test results came in.

As early as 1953, for instance, Sid Gottlieb went overseas with a supply of a hallucinogenic drug—almost certainly LSD. With unknown results, he arranged for it to be slipped to a speaker at a political rally, presumably to see if it would make a fool of him.

These were freewheeling days within the CIA—then a young agency whose bureaucratic arteries had not started to harden. The leaders of MKULTRA had high hopes for LSD. It appeared to be an awesome substance, whose advent, like the ancient discovery of fire, would bring out primitive responses of fear and worship in people. Only a speck of LSD could take a strong-willed man and turn his most basic perceptions into willowy shadows.

Time, space, right, wrong, order, and the notion of what was possible all took on new faces. LSD was a frightening weapon, and it took a swashbuckling boldness for the leaders of MKULTRA to prepare for operational testing the way they first did: by taking it themselves. They tripped at the office. They tripped at safe-houses, and sometimes they traveled to Boston to trip under Bob Hyde’s penetrating gaze. Always they observed, questioned, and analyzed each other. LSD seemed to remove inhibitions, and they thought they could use it to find out what went on in the mind underneath all the outside acts and pretensions. If they could get at the inner self, they reasoned, they could better manipulate a person—or keep him from being manipulated.

The men from MKULTRA were trying LSD in the early 1950s—when Stalin lived and Joe McCarthy raged. It was a foreboding time, even for those not professionally responsible for doomsday poisons. Not surprisingly, Sid Gottlieb and colleagues who tried LSD did not think of the drug as something that might enhance creativity or cause transcendental experiences. Those notions would not come along for years. By and large, there was thought to be only one prevailing and hardheaded version of reality, which was “normal,” and everything else was “crazy.” An LSD trip made people temporarily crazy, which meant potentially vulnerable to the CIA men (and mentally ill, to the doctors). The CIA experimenters did not trip for the



experience itself, or to get high, or to sample new realities. They were testing a weapon; for their purposes, they might as well have been in a ballistics lab.

Despite this prevailing attitude in the Agency, at least one MKULTRA pioneer recalls that his first trip expanded his conception of reality: “I was shaky at first, but then I just experienced it and had a high. I felt that everything was working right. I was like a locomotive going at top efficiency. Sure there was stress, but not in a debilitating way. It was like the stress of an engine pulling the longest train it’s ever pulled.”

This CIA veteran describes seeing all the colors of the rainbow growing out of cracks in the sidewalk. He had always disliked cracks as signs of imperfection, but suddenly the cracks became natural stress lines that measured the vibrations of the universe. He saw people with blemished faces, which he had previously found slightly repulsive. “I had a change of values about faces,” he says. “Hooked noses or crooked teeth would become beautiful for that person. Something had turned loose in me, and all I had done was shift my attitude. Reality hadn’t changed, but I had. That was all the difference in the world between seeing something ugly, and seeing truth and beauty.”

At the end of this day of his first trip, the CIA man and his colleagues had an alcohol party to help come down. “I had a lump in my throat,” he recalls wistfully. Although he had never done such a thing before, he wept in front of his coworkers. “I didn’t want to leave it. I felt I would be going back to a place where I wouldn’t be able to hold on to this kind of beauty. I felt very unhappy. The people who wrote the report on me said I had experienced depression, but they didn’t understand why I felt so bad. They thought I had had a bad trip.”

This CIA man says that others with his general personality tended to enjoy themselves on LSD, but that the stereotypical CIA operator (particularly the extreme counterintelligence type who mistrusts everyone and everything) usually had negative reactions. The drug simply exaggerated his paranoia. For these operators, the official notes, “dark evil things would begin to lurk around,” and they would decide the experimenters were plotting against them.

The TSS team understood it would be next to impossible to allay the fears of this ever-vigilant, suspicious sort, although they might use LSD to disorient or generally confuse such a person. However, they toyed with the idea that LSD could be applied to better advantage on more trusting types. Could a clever foe “re-educate” such a person with a skillful application of LSD?

Speculating on this question, the CIA official states that while under the influence of the drug, “you tend to have a more global view of things. I found it awfully hard when stoned to maintain the notion: I am a U.S. citizen—my country right or wrong . . . You tend to have these good higher feelings. You are more open to the brotherhood-of-man idea and more susceptible to the seamy sides of your own society . . . I think this is exactly what happened during the 1960s, but it didn’t make people more communist. It just made them less inclined to identify with the U.S. They took a plague-on-both-your-houses position.”

As to whether his former colleagues in TSS had the same perception of the LSD experience, the man replies, “I think everybody understood that if you had a good trip, you had a kind of above-it-all look into reality. What we subsequently found was that when you came down, you remembered the experience, but you didn’t switch identities. You really didn’t have that kind of feeling. You weren’t as suspicious of people. You listened to them, but you also saw through them more easily and clearly. We decided that this wasn’t the kind of thing that was going to make a guy into a turncoat to his own country. The more we worked with it,

the less we became convinced this was what the Communists were using for brainwashing.”

The early LSD tests—both outside and inside the Agency—had gone well enough that the MKULTRA scientists moved forward to the next stage on the road to “field” use: They tried the drug out on people by surprise. This, after all, would be the way an operator would give—or get—the drug. First they decided to spring it on each other without warning. They agreed among themselves that a coworker might slip it to them at any time. (In what may be an apocryphal story, a TSS staff man says that one of his former colleagues always brought his own bottle of wine to office parties and carried it with him at all times.) Unwitting doses became an occupational hazard.

MKULTRA men usually took these unplanned trips in stride, but occasionally they turned nasty. Two TSS veterans tell the story of a coworker who drank some LSD-laced coffee during his morning break. Within an hour, states one veteran, “he sort of knew he had it, but he couldn’t pull himself together. Sometimes you take it, and you start the process of maintaining your composure. But this grabbed him before he was aware, and it got away from him.”

Filled with fear, the CIA man fled the building that then housed TSS, located on the edge of the Mall near Washington’s great monuments. Having lost sight of him, his colleagues searched frantically, but he managed to escape. The hallucinating Agency man worked his way across one of the Potomac bridges and apparently cut his last links with rationality. “He reported afterwards that every automobile that came by was a terrible monster with fantastic eyes, out to get him personally,” says the veteran. “Each time a car passed, he would huddle down against the parapet, terribly frightened. It was a real horror trip for him. I mean, it was hours of agony. It was like a dream that never stops—with someone chasing you.”

After about an hour and a half, the victim’s coworkers found him on the Virginia side of the Potomac, crouched under a fountain, trembling. “It was awfully hard to persuade him that his friends were his friends at that point,” recalls the colleague. “He was alone in the world, and everyone was hostile. He’d become a full-blown paranoid. If it had lasted for two weeks, we’d have plunked him in a mental hospital.” Fortunately for him, the CIA man came down by the end of the day. This was not the first, last, or most tragic bad trip in the Agency’s testing program.⁸

By late 1953, only six months after Allen Dulles had formally created MKULTRA, TSS officials were already well into the last stage of their research: systematic use of LSD on “outsiders” who had no idea they had received the drug. These victims simply felt their moorings slip away in the midst of an ordinary day, for no apparent reason, and no one really knew how they would react.

Sid Gottlieb was ready for the operational experiments. He considered LSD to be such a secret substance that he gave it a private code name (“serunim”) by which he and his colleagues often referred to the drug, even behind the CIA’s heavily guarded doors.

In retrospect, it seems more than bizarre that CIA officials—men responsible for the nation’s intelligence and alertness when the hot and cold wars against the Communists were at their peak—would be sneaking LSD into each other’s coffee cups and thereby subjecting themselves to the unknown frontiers of experimental drugs. But these side trips did not seem to change the sense of reality of Gottlieb or of high CIA officials, who took LSD on several occasions. The drug did not transform Gottlieb out of the mind-set of a master scientist-spy, a protégé of Richard Helms in the CIA’s inner circle. He never stopped milking his goats at 5:30

every morning.

The CIA leaders' early achievements with LSD were impressive. They had not invented the drug, but they had gotten in on the American ground floor and done nearly everything else. They were years ahead of the scientific literature—let alone the public—and spies win by being ahead. They had monopolized the supply of LSD and dominated the research by creating much of it themselves. They had used money and other blandishments to build a network of scientists and doctors whose work they could direct and turn to their own use. All that remained between them and major espionage successes was the performance of the drug in the field.

That, however, turned out to be a considerable stumbling block. LSD had an incredibly powerful effect on people, but not in ways the CIA could predict or control.

Endnotes

1. During the 1950s, Boston Psychopathic changed its name to Massachusetts Mental Health Center, the name it bears today.
2. Pronounced M-K-ULTRA. The MK digraph simply identified it as a TSS project. As for the ULTRA part, it may have had its etymological roots in the most closely guarded Anglo-American World War II intelligence secret, the ULTRA program, which handled the cracking of German military codes. While good espionage tradecraft called for cryptonyms to have no special meaning, wartime experiences were still very much on the minds of men like Allen Dulles.
3. By no means did TSS neglect other drugs. It looked at hundreds of others from cocaine to nicotine, with special emphasis on special-purpose substances. One 1952 memo talked about the urgent operational need for a chemical “producing general listlessness and lethargy.” Another mentioned finding—as TSS later did—a potion to accelerate the effects of liquor, called an “alcohol extender.”
4. As happened to Albert Hofmann the first time, Abramson once unknowingly ingested some LSD, probably by swallowing water from his spiked snail tank. He started to feel bad but, with his wife's help, he finally pinpointed the cause. According to brain and dolphin expert John Lilly, who heard the story from Mrs. Abramson, Harold was greatly relieved that his discomfort was not grave. “Oh, it's nothing serious,” he said. “It's just an LSD psychosis. I'll just go to bed and sleep it off.”
5. Army researchers, as usual running about five years behind the CIA, became interested in the sustained use of LSD as an interrogation device during 1961 field tests (called Operation THIRD CHANCE). The Army men tested the drug in Europe on nine foreigners and one American, a black soldier named James Thornwell, accused of stealing classified documents. While Thornwell was reacting to the drug under extremely stressful conditions, his captors threatened “to extend the state indefinitely, even to a permanent condition of insanity,” according to an Army document. Thornwell is now suing the U.S. government for \$30 million. In one of those twists that Washington insiders take for granted and outsiders do not quite believe, Terry Lenzner, a partner of the same law firm seeking this huge sum for Thornwell, is the lawyer for Sid Gottlieb, the man who oversaw the 77-day trips at Lexington and even more dangerous LSD testing.
6. A 1975 CIA document clears up the mystery of how the Agency's military sources could have made such a huge error in estimating Sandoz's LSD supply (and probably also explains the earlier inaccurate report that the Russians had bought 50,000,000 doses). What happened, according to the document, was that the U.S. military attaché in Switzerland did not know the difference between a milligram (1/1,000 of a gram) and a kilogram (1,000 grams). This mix-up threw all his calculations off by a factor of 1,000,000.
7. Military security agencies supported the LSD work of such well-known researchers as Amedeo Marrazzi of the University of Minnesota and Missouri Institute of Psychiatry; Henry Beecher of Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital; Charles Savage while he was at the Naval Medical Research Institute; James Dille of the University of Washington; Gerald Klee of the University of Maryland Medical School; Neil Burch of Baylor University (who performed later experiments for the CIA); and Paul Hoch and James Cattell of the New York State Psychiatric Institute, whose forced injections of a mescaline derivative led to the 1953 death of New York tennis professional Harold Blauer. (Dr. Cattell later told Army investigators, “We didn't know whether it was dog piss or what it was we were giving him.”)

8. TSS officials had long known that LSD could be quite dangerous. In 1952, Harvard Medical School's Henry Beecher, who regularly gave the Agency information on his talks with European colleagues, reported that a Swiss doctor had suffered severe depression after taking the drug, and had killed herself three weeks later.

Source Materials

- The description of Robert Hyde's first trip came from interviews with Dr. Milton Greenblatt, Dr. J. Herbert DeShon, and a talk by Max Rinkel at the 2nd Macy Conference on Neuropharmacology, pp. 235-36, edited by Harold A. Abramson, 1955: Madison Printing Company.
- The descriptions of TSS and Sidney Gottlieb came from interviews with Ray Cline, John Stockwell, about 10 other ex-CIA officers, and other friends of Gottlieb.
- Memos quoted on the early MKULTRA program include *Memorandum from ADDP Helms to DCI Dulles*, 4/3/53, Tab A, pp. 1-2 (quoted in Church Committee Report, Book I); APF A-1, April 13, 1953; *Memorandum for Deputy Director (Administration, Subject: Project MKULTRA—Extremely Sensitive Research and Development Program*; #A/B,I,64/6, 6 February 1952; *Memorandum for the Record, Subject: Contract with [deleted]* #A/B,I,64/29, undated; and *Memorandum for Technical Services Staff, Subject: Alcohol Antagonists and Accelerators, Research and Development Project*. The Gottlieb quote is from *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Senate Committee on Human Resources*, September 21, 1977, p. 206.
- The background data on LSD came particularly from *The Beyond Within: The LSD Story* by Sidney Cohen (New York: Atheneum, 1972). Other sources included *Origins of Psychopharmacology: From CPZ to LSD* by Anne E. Caldwell (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1970) and Document 352, "An OSI Study of the Strategic Medical Importance of LSD-25," 30 August 1955.
- TSS's use of outside researchers came from interviews with four former TSSers. MKULTRA Subprojects 8, 10, 63, and 66 described Robert Hyde's work. Subprojects 7, 27, and 40 concerned Harold Abramson. Hodge's work was in subprojects 17 and 46. Carl Pfeiffer's Agency connection, along with Hyde's, Abramson's, and Isbell's, was laid out by Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, *Memorandum for the Record, 1 December 1953, Subject: Conversation with Dr. Willis Gibbons of TSS re Olson Case* (found at p. 1030, Kennedy Subcommittee 1975 Biomedical and Behavioral Research Hearings). Isbell's testing program was also described at those hearings, as it was in *Document #14, 24 July, 1953, Memo For: Liaison & Security Officer/TSS, Subject #71 An Account of the Chemical Division's Contacts in the National Institute of Health*; *Document #37, 14 July 1954, subject [deleted]*; and *Document #41, 31 August, 1956, Subject: Trip to Lexington, Ky., 21-23 August 1956*. Isbell's program was further described in a "Report on ADAMHA Involvement in LSD Research," found at p. 993 of 1975 Kennedy subcommittee hearings. The firsthand account of the actual testing came from an interview with Edward M. Flowers, Washington, D.C.
- The section on TSS's noncontract informants came from interviews with TSS sources, reading the proceedings of the Macy Conferences on "Problems of Consciousness" and "Neuropharmacology," and interviews with several participants including Sidney Cohen, Humphrey Osmond, and Hudson Hoagland.
- The material on CIA's relations with Sandoz and Eli Lilly came from *Document #24, 16 November, 1953, Subject: ARTICHOKE Conference*; *Document #268, 23 October, 1953, Subject: Meeting in Director's Office at 1100 hours on 23 October with Mr. Wisner and [deleted]*; *Document # 316, 6 January, 1954, Subject: Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD-25)*; and *Document #338, 26 October 1954, Subject: Potential Large Scale Availability of LSD through newly discovered synthesis by [deleted]*; interviews with Sandoz and Lilly former executives; interviews with TSS sources; and Sidney Gottlieb's testimony before Kennedy subcommittee, 1977, p. 203.
- Henry Beecher's US government connections were detailed in his private papers, in a report on the Swiss-LSD death to the CIA at p. 396, Church Committee Report, Book I, and in interviews with two of his former associates.
- The description of TSS's internal testing progression comes from interviews with former staff members. The short reference to Sid Gottlieb's arranging for LSD to be given a speaker at a political rally comes from *Document #A/B, II, 26/8, 9 June 1954, Subject: MKULTRA*. Henry Beecher's report to the CIA on the Swiss suicide is found at p. 396, *Church Committee Report, Book I*.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Ten

*"Try to forget me.
Try to erase me."*

—Pearl Jam, "Jeremy," 1992.

xvi.

She's curled up with many of them, they've dressed her in long leaves & vines, when she seemed to gnaw off the clothes she came in. They take turns with her, knowing she is warm-blooded & somehow troubled peoplefolk, welcome to stay, but peoplefolk don't, not perpetually—

Sometimes they nudge her up, her growling & snapping, to a stream, make her splash & wash, she's scrawny & will eat little but a few nuts, a few berries—a good wash—

The Tenders among them sniff her good, she is disquiet, a kind of peoplefolk unhappy, so they eventually are moved to sing to her, *hmmmmmm*, she calms a little, listens, they are able to cuddle around her for warming as the music comforts her heart—

Other Creatures join in, at will & whim, the *hmmm* now always going, something in her wakes, toward thoughts, toward words, this is good for peoplefolk, to say, to tell—

She sits among them, studies them closely. She is bright, she watches & listens closely, she is like their Princess—

She more willing eats & drinks water, shows her gratefulness by touch, stroke—goes to the stream every morning, not needing so often to clean but it comforts her, lightens her heart—

Still, not quite words. Neither aloud or otherwise. There is no rush among Creatures. But they've known impatience among peoplefolk in the past.

Then she begins to smile. The Creatures are entranced by her smile, not sure how to provoke it but it warms them & her touch often couples with it—

She begins to dream, & to invite them in, clusters of them, touching close, following her in, unsure where, but loving her, tending her, always the *hmmm*—

And in the dreams she *hmmmmmmms* too, deeply, beautifully, they nuzzle close, transfixed, fed by her music, there is no place to know, just the sound, the world of her low, sweet sound—

Then she talks, softly, but sure, she says, "Dream waves" & poof! & wow—

xvii.

You are lying on your couch & you are smoking good aliens-hash, the lights are off but the one on the monitor showing you the program: *Dream Waves*.

This is the one with that hot blonde chick, the one with the pink stripe in her hair, follow her every episode as she leaves the cave where she lives, followed by the various kinds of animals she lives with, to the water, it's an ocean—she strips off the vines & leaves she's wearing, cute ass, not much else, skinny, but something, you always tempt to pause the picture, jack it good to her standing there nude on the beach, but you don't, unsure why, but now she & the animals are all diving into the ocean surf, swimming hard, deeper in, deeper in, it gets very dark, how is she able to go this deep? But further in till she & her friends arrive somewhere, deeper than the ocean, they arrive to somewhere dry & walk together, each episode somewhere new, & she never talks, not once—

One time, they are watching a brave knight far from his own land, & he is lonely & he wishes to come home, but his commanders won't let him, men of a different faith, his small land is one of countless in their empire, his job to observe & report on the trains running in the area, how often, carrying passengers or materials—

He is lonely & he sometimes rides hard alongside the trains, sometimes riding ahead & leaping recklessly across the tracks as the train oncomes—

Night comes & they are close to his campfire. Maya is arrayed to go to him, a gauzy dress for his notice & touch—

“No.”

He is looking at her closely, telling her so she is not confused his intentions. She does not understand but he is sweetly close to her. The fire sparking forever into the stars as they *hmmm* together, as her friends are just out of the light & the night sings with his happiness—this gift, this song, this embrace—

Suddenly the two of them are there again, come up to the projector's room from the seats down below—

“Maya again?” she smiles.

You nod.

“Why not join us? Why not me?” no accusation, just affection, just curiosity.

“I don't know.” And it's true. Since you sat there cumming together, brilliant blowout, you left & came here, & turned on the computer for no reason, & found *Dream Waves* on the *TripTown* site—was it really a show? Between stories, dives into the ocean, the camera would show her in the cavern with her little friends, you'd tuned it in for hours, all hours, *she lived there*—how was this show made? what did it mean?

“I want to go to her,” you finally say to them. “Just me,” you add, with difficulty for them, not yourself. “I need your help.” Unhappy, both of them, really, they nod.

xviii.

Kinley is back to teaching. It was inevitable. He & Christina had left the Island, hired a strange boat docked there briefly, left off on a mainland, a long while simply traveled, a little food, a little water, a lot of sex, but eventually slowed in a village, artisans, fishermen, bonfire dances at night—

“What century is this, Kinley?”

“Does it matter?”

“No.”

“You like this place?”

“Yes.”

Thus Kinley conjures up classes for young & old. Skills like hunting & cleaning game, crafts like carving & furniture making. Arts like painting & music. Things always learned casually, by who knew whom, now cohered & gathered. Those with skills a little more venerated, a little more self-aware.

Christina kept close, then closer. She was not as well-liked in this village. She thought of Maya, wondered if she “sniffed wrong” to them—

“Why me, not you?”

“Why?”

“They want me to leave, Kinley, & let their daughters have at you.”

He laughs. Acknowledges this, is indifferent to it.

“Christina, we’re through with this.”

“Tell me.”

“No.”

“*Tell me.*”

He sighs, hoists her up around him as he stands in their hut’s kitchen, gets enough of her dress & his trouser arranged to swiftly penetrate her deeply as he continues to speak steadily & calmly. “I love you, Christina.” Deep hard thrust. She bites her lip.

“I could have one or more of the tasty girls they are making sure sit up front in my classes”—two quick thrusts. She moans & tries not to.

“But we’re not here to stay & I’m not leaving with you crazier than you are”—thrusts so hard she yells, then pulls back oh-so-slowly, mouthing the words “now cum for me” which she does so hard she crashes him to the floor. But smiling.

“It’s not that I’m selfish about you.”

“No.”

“Or that they’re better than me.”

“Not that either.”

“A couple of them even took a look at my ass.”

“More than a couple, I’m sure. It’s a sexy fucking ass.”

She smiles. He’s trying.

“You can have one if you really want,” she whispers, suddenly interested in this.



“Why?”

“Can I choose?” she insists.

He nods. Lets her have this battle.

She shows up at the door that night, dressed for full lips, full breasts, good hips. Sniffs for Christina but does not ask.

She is a painter, a really good one. Has brought a canvas, brushes, paints.

“Undress me.”

“I? No.”

“Undress me. You’ll paint me in the nude.”

She protests, makes to leave, doesn’t. He does not move to touch or kiss her. Simply lets her undress him & he lounges in the bed.

She sets up her canvas, red-faced, half-scared. He smiles at her steadily.

“Would you prefer me hard or flaccid?”

“Hard,” she whispers.

Suddenly the Gate-Keeper calls, “Cut!”

“Cut?” says Christina, who’d been in the closet, watching & er, touching too.

The Gate-Keeper walks onto the set. A short man, muscular & pudgy both. Picks up & tosses Kinley’s trousers to him.

“Thanks, boss.” Gate-Keeper nods.

The girl looks terrified.

Christina helps her pack up her art things. Embraces her. “I’m sure he would have enjoyed you,” she says comfortingly.

“Again?” says Kinley.

Gate-Keeper nods.

“How many more scenarios? Futuristic village starship. Underground sex Valhalla? Remote, timeless village where nobody has ever thought of school as a concept?”

Christina tells the girl to go, since this is going to get heated.

She doesn’t move. “I was an excuse by those of us who didn’t want you around. My . . . father. When you dimmed out the lights to bed me, he & his men would be in here with accusations of rape. And ropes.” Her look was not pleased. The site of his cock hard for her made her feel her bonds all the tighter.

Christina is little taller than the Gate-Keeper but she steps forward to smack him hard, one in the face, one in the gut. Bent over, he groans & breathes hard.

“OK, OK,” he pants.

xix.

Tis negotiating with a snake, behold these proceedings. We address a long piece of cream-colored parchment, a purple line running down both its vertical sides, toward me, the snake up there, his lines approaching me at the bottom—

They began to curl & loop as they get nearer, wilder & wilder until they arrive, these crazy lines, in the form of a great purple hooded snake—

“Sign!” I say.

“Sign!” I command, to seal our deal that the snakes may come again, that we will refrain our strong poisons kill them.

There is peace. This is what I sought, among confoundingly stubborn men & snakes alike, an end to this war. It is sealed; it is done.

I return to my tent, close the flap behind me. You are lighting a lamp that we may sit together awhile.

I’m not sure how you came to me & you do not talk. A bad night, not long ago, when my efforts seemed all vain. You were in my bed under my covers, nude, when I returned, staggering from a few hours spent with some Travelers camped near here. Not that these warring sides knew or cared Travelers.

But I valued their smoke, & their company. Travelers never had war in their bones as most men did. They sought calm & play among folk, & ever closeness to the green. They comforted me, & had taken to traveling nearby when I was in my hard negotiating.

I thought you one of them, sent to sweeten my smoky comforts. Young, underfed, but pretty, willing, a touch to your nipples & pussy told me—

So twas funny when I didn’t with you—I held you, held you for all my life, supped upon your warmth, your sweetness, how you enjoyed my embrace, you began to sing softly to me, to *hmmmmmm* & I slept, slept well, smiling hopeful. And you gone by my waking.

A gift. Thankee. It was a month or more later, same kind of hard day, late night with Travelers & their pipes, stumble back, you among my blankets. Not a word.

What this. How. I wanted to ask you, them, someone. You old enough to be a Traveler’s lover, soon wife. Did I do wrong? I did not summon you.

Finally, the third time, me feeling how hard your ever more familiar touch made me, gritting hard below to resist, I talked.

“Are you a Traveler? Do they send you to me?”

Your fiercely beautiful purple eyes hold mine in your ’witching smile, long, longer, longest.

"I'm Maya," you say simply.

I nod. "I'm leaving tonight. I wanted to tell you goodbye at least. But—" She smiles.

"Now I don't. I don't claim you, Maya, but I would keep your company for awhile yet. Please." She makes to undress but I shake my head. "Your soul is a mystery to me. I have no right to enjoy the mysteries of your body."

We lay together as previous, but I am worse disturbed. I feel her hand on my hardness, stroking gently, as never I had quite known, & she, she *hmmmmms* me to burst, & she crawls down to lick me dry, then curls in my arms smiling to sleep.

Before dawn, I am packed on my back & walking from the rest. These men & their snakes will have to keep their own peace.

Maya is small & I carry her while she still sleeps. The predawn woods are quiet. Yet . . . I am watched. Watched closely.

At dawn, miles away, a pause for breath & water. A clearing.

Maya sleepily pokes at my hasty fire.

"Tell them come."

Looks up sharply at me.

"Your friends. Allies. Guardians. My assassins. Let them come."

"No. Friends," she says & with more of that *hmmm* magic she summons a number of Creatures, bunny, bears, hedgehog, leopard, others—

They come to me, sniffing & looking me over. No simple woods animals or pets.

So I address them in my man's common tongue & hope for the best.

"Maya is my friend. She has given me comfort & company & now we travel together. I hope I can call all of you friends in time too."

The White Bunny with strangely compelling eyes hops into my lap, small but potent. Looks me up & down, sniffs twice. Seems satisfied as she leans to nap in my grasp. The rest find their many places in my lap too or next to me.

Maya smiles.

xx.

Kinley & Christina travel vaguely by long empty roads, finding food & rest & sex enough along the way.

"Kinley."

"Christina."

"When? Where?"

"What?"

"Where are we going? When do we get there?"

"I don't know."

"And you're OK with this?"

"I'm with you."

She laughs & hits him. They kiss, she considers. But he pulls back a moment.

"Something's coming soon."

"What? Tell me."

He points, smiling.

Along the road approaching them comes a strange conveyance. Driven, even more strangely, by two bloo-eyed kittees, pedaling away. A red-lipped goldfish sitting comfortably between them.

They pull up to the smiling Kinley & shocked Christina. "Tis a BoatWagon," he eplains, sort of.

Kinley opens the door to the back seat of the BoatWagon, she gets in, him after her. Then he immediately safety belts them both.

"Safety first, Christina," he says smiling.

The Kittees have been watching with amazed bloo eyes & once satisfied, they turn back to their pedaling & driving.

"Kinley."

"Christina."

"*Tell me.*"

"Well, they are mentioned in the little books."

"The ones in your coat?"

"Yes. These."

Kinley starts to page among them but Christina stops him. "It's OK. I trust you. Where are they bringing us?"

The Fish turns to look at us, smiles, speaks.

"To help."

We lean forward, listen. She's a pretty fish, beautiful red lips. Christina thinks a thought she'd never had toward a fish before, shakes it off, listens.

She talks in a sweet & soft voice.

"There is a game, called The Realist, which is played at parties & picnics. Someone is secretly selected as The Killer & at some point in the event begins to 'kill' people off singly or in groups. Whoever survives to the dawn wins.

"Perhaps there is a tournament where winners advance to the next party or picnic.

"But then the Realist begins to actually people at certain parties & picnics, & it comes clear that there is a real killer Realist. There might be a good Realist to oppose him, & their paths approach—"

She stops suddenly.

Chrstina's hand on Kinley tightens.

"Kinley's the good Realist?"

She stares at them. Not smiling. Returns to looking at the road between Kittees.

"Kinley."

"Christina."

"This?"

"I think so."

"Can I say no?"

"Yes."

"And back to the vague raod?"

"I guess so."

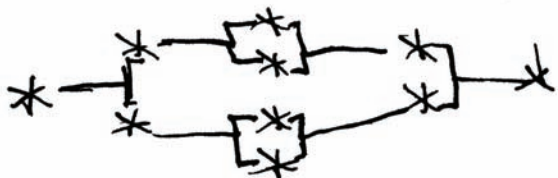
Christina sighs. She misses Maya. Even sharing Kinley with her wasn't so bad.

"How hot can I dress for a picnic."

He laughs. "Hot as you like."

xxi.

Sitting at a table mapping out a series of stories.



Versions & sequels, it gets very complicated, I can't finish it.

"Rebecca."

"Raymond."

"What is this?"

"It's *Labyrinthine*."

"What is *Labyrinthine*?"

"It's your current book."

"Why?"

"That was the last one."

"Why do I write this?"

"You like to."

"Like to?"

"Want to. Will to."

"Why?"

"Because it fascinates you. It's fun."

"What else?"

"It's what you do best."

"I read *Blue Period* this week, from 1998."

"I was there."

"You & I began our romance. I struggled to understand it."

"And you did."

"And I married you, I think in *New Period* the next year."

"Yes. The acid many-marriage."

"And then in 2005 I married in my common world. You were now 25. She was just shy of 21."

"Yes."

"Two wives."

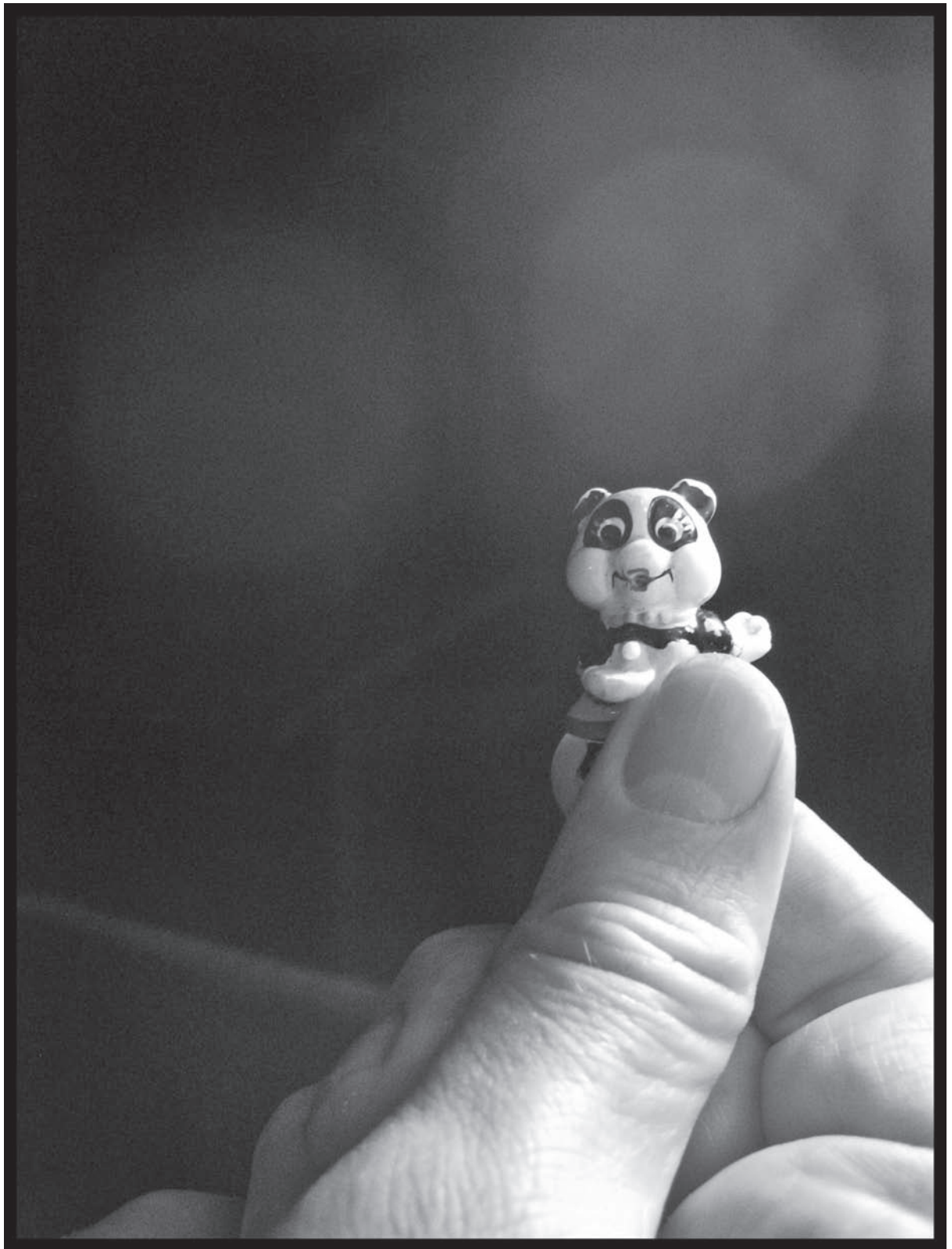
"Two worlds."

"At least."

"She likes these stories. Some lovers didn't."

"Good."

"I'm still wondering why, Rebecca."



"That's what you do. Wonder why, & write."

"Is it good?"

"It's you. You breathe, you eat, you walk, you make love to her in that world, me in this world, you write. You write, Raymond."

"It's my gift."

"This world is your gift."

"This world is my thank you."

"Yes, Raymond."

xxii.

To get where we're going, I need a boat. Nobody tells me how to figure this shit out. Jazz doesn't help when she could.

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"An island?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't fucking know, Jazz."

"Who is bossing you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Who?"

I sit at the table in this shitty motel room, its excuse for a desk. Not too close to her. Still.

"I was sent to bring you back. Something went wrong. You know that."

"I got old, Toby. Why didn't you?"

"Jazz, look in the mirror."

"Why don't you tell me? Be my mirror." She laughs but not so much.

"The longer we travel, the younger you get."

"Is that what you like?"

"It's what *every* guy likes, Jazz. But that's not the point."

"What is?"

"When we get there, you'll be the age you were that night. With the van."

"The failed gangbang little sister night."

"Yah, that one."

Jasmine sees no lie in him & he doesn't seem to know more than he's answering.

So she asks: "Ashleigh?"

"She's there."

"She knows I'm coming."

"I don't know."

"Does *she*?"

"I *don't fucking* know."

"What happens when we get there?"

"That's up to him."

"Who?"

"Your master."

"I don't have a master."

"He's waiting."

Jasmine takes her bag & is in the bathroom about half an hour. Showers, cleans up. Comes out dressed, no halter tops, no cherry lipstick. Brown hair tied back. All business. Hotter than fucking ever.

Toby nods. She's trying. OK.

They leave the room finally & there is no car waiting, as there had been the other motel departure mornings.

And have to get to the water.

"Wanna hitch?"

"That might work too well with you."

"Thanks, I guess."

They walk out to the road, looking at what the highway shows them each way.

Toby nods. "There."

"What?"

"That diner. It will bring us some of the way."

"A diner?"

"Yah. It's one of theirs. The name."

"Black Dog Diner."

"Yah. It's one of the few clues they gave me."

"Clues, Toby?"

"Yah. Look. Jasmine. Maybe if we do this, get there, something good happens."

Starts to talk. Stops. Nods. Takes his hand. Black Dog Diner it is.

She's hungry, & not for the junk food from the machines she's been living on. Pancakes, eggs. Toast, waffles. Milk. OJ.

"Too much you'll lose that jailbait figure."

"Aww, Toby. You so sweet." Her grey eyes twinkle.

He sticks to coffee.

"How did you end up in that bar?"

She's chewing, toast in one hand, knife dripping jelly in the other.

"We couldn't get out, Toby."

"I got you & her out, Jazz. That's why I don't understand why you were in that bar."

Jazz puts down her knife, finishes her chews, gets no more. She reaches across the table for Toby's hand. He hesitates, sees only calm, sincere need on her face. Takes it, small, in his larger.

Closes her eyes. Begins to breathe slower until a steady pace.

A waitress approaches, Toby shakes her away with a smile, the kind he saves for older women, hint of a guilty flirt in it. She nods, moves away.

Jazz talks softly. Like she's mesmerized herself. Toby's not surprised she can.

"It goes back to that day of the van."

Toby flinches. Real guilt. Her hand remains moveless in his.

"At school I saw my friend, the boy who tutors me. We sort of have a crush on each other but he won't make a move. Just sneaks looks at me. He doesn't know I dress for his looks."

"A boy, Jazz?" Toby can't help but say.

"He's not like other boys. He's sweet. I dunno. I guess I like different kinds." Her voice fades soft.

"Go on," Toby squeezes her hand.

"I gave him a poem by Cosmic Early. It's sort of a magick text. If he figures it out, it will tell him some things about me. It will help."

"So you went home."

"Yes. My mom & stepdad had to go out of town for a funeral. So me & Ash were alone."

"What did you do?"

"I was where I used to go when I was bored. The chatroom."

Toby laughs. "Those old guys stood no chance."

"They were lonely, confused. Horny. Harmless."

"Didn't they bore you?"

"Yes and no. The ones I liked I kept."

"Did you tell them anything?"

"No. I'm not stupid."

"There's a but here—"

The Black Dog Diner lurches slowly into motion. Rolls from its reserved parking space onto the road, moving along like a truck hauling a long wide freight. Eventually the sense of moving is little more than that on a passenger airplane.

"Go on, Jazz."

"He came that last night. He seemed agitated. I don't remember much what we said but he gave me this bad feeling. Like foreboding. It wasn't sexual with him, like the others most of the time. It was concern." Toby steels himself for the next part.

"You didn't take us the first time."

"We . . . didn't?"

"No. We were taken to Global Wall in the White Woods, separated."

"How did you escape?"

"The White Woods was destroyed."

"It was?"

"For a moment. So the night went differently. We were home & you took us."

Her hand remains calm in his. But her grey eyes are open & steady staring at him.

"Your turn."

Toby tries to pull away but Jazz is much stronger than she looks. "Tell me."

Smiles at him. Kindly. No blame. Inwardly Toby convulses, feels something for this girl, little to do with her pretty face or hot body. Perhaps what that boy she liked feels. He's a shitting dickhead though. *Fuck. OK. Whatever.*

Close his eyes, takes his deep breath.

"We used chloroform to knock you out."

"The first time."

"Yes."

"The time that didn't happen."

"Um. Yes."

She squeezes his hand, go on.

"Billy was driving. The weed & the Scotch was going around. We'd never done anything like this as a group.

"Denny wanted a taste while you two were lying there in the back of the van."

"No."

"the fuck, Toby? You gonna have 'em both & make us circle jerk around you?"

I say nothing. Denny is the only one who challenges my lead in our group. Fucking hot-headed wide receiver.

"Wait till we're at the cabin," I say definitely.

Just to up me a bit, Denny reaches over, pushes up your blouse a bit, we all get a nice look. Then he stops.

"Would you have done it?"

"I don't know. Yes. No. Alcohol. Frustration. We'd parked near your house before, & didn't go in. Your parents."

"You were dumb fucking jocks but not stupid."

"Yah."

"Then we crashed, driving too fast up a mountain. There were lights, & a spaceship, it was fucking crazy."

"You were all up there."

"Yes. It's how we ended up in that van." Toby smiles sheepishly. "Aside from being good solid dickheads."

Jazz laughs. He's not trying to impress her. He's apologized so that's relaxed him.

"OK, you can tell me."

"It was my first girlfriend. Her name was Rosie. She was only here for a year. She wouldn't tell me so much except that she wasn't staying."

"And you fell for her."

They fell for each other. Her family was Spanish & Catholic & he was a boy & an athlete. And a boy.

Before him, Rosie had found boys funny, & easy to resist. They didn't know why her family was different. What she was. They saw tits—& hers were nice—& an ass—even nicer—but these didn't begin to tell—

Or why her family had to relocate for a year. Their house burned to the ground. Best to leave because of it for awhile. And whatever her dad did, this town had another office.

He was sweet. She wasn't surprised he had a sister, or that they shared a wall between their bedrooms.

"I told her about the dreams I always had of the ships overhead. She didn't laugh. Not even close."

It was a desperate move to calm her, to show her she hadn't made a mistake. Coming with him to the cabin, shortest skirt, lowest halter top. They didn't drink much, she did more than him.

They began at the table, he made the one chicken dish he knew. She was delighted. Then the couch, the fireplace. Her kisses would have been enough for him. Not pushing. Not pushing. He could have jacked off in the bathroom, driven her home, whatever. Her face, her smile, enveloped him. Her body near him nearly choked his mind. His sister's phone calls only told him two things about this moment: tell her she's the sexiest girl he's ever known, & get *down there & lick. A lot.*

But she had explained her family's faith, how much it mattered, he nodded, it was OK, it wasn't, *it was OK.*

But she was on top of him on this couch, pulling off her halter top, her black bra beneath, burying him in her slow wet kiss, now a hand on his jeans, pushing rubbing, oh shit, *oh shit—*

"Rosie."

"I want you."

"But."

"No."

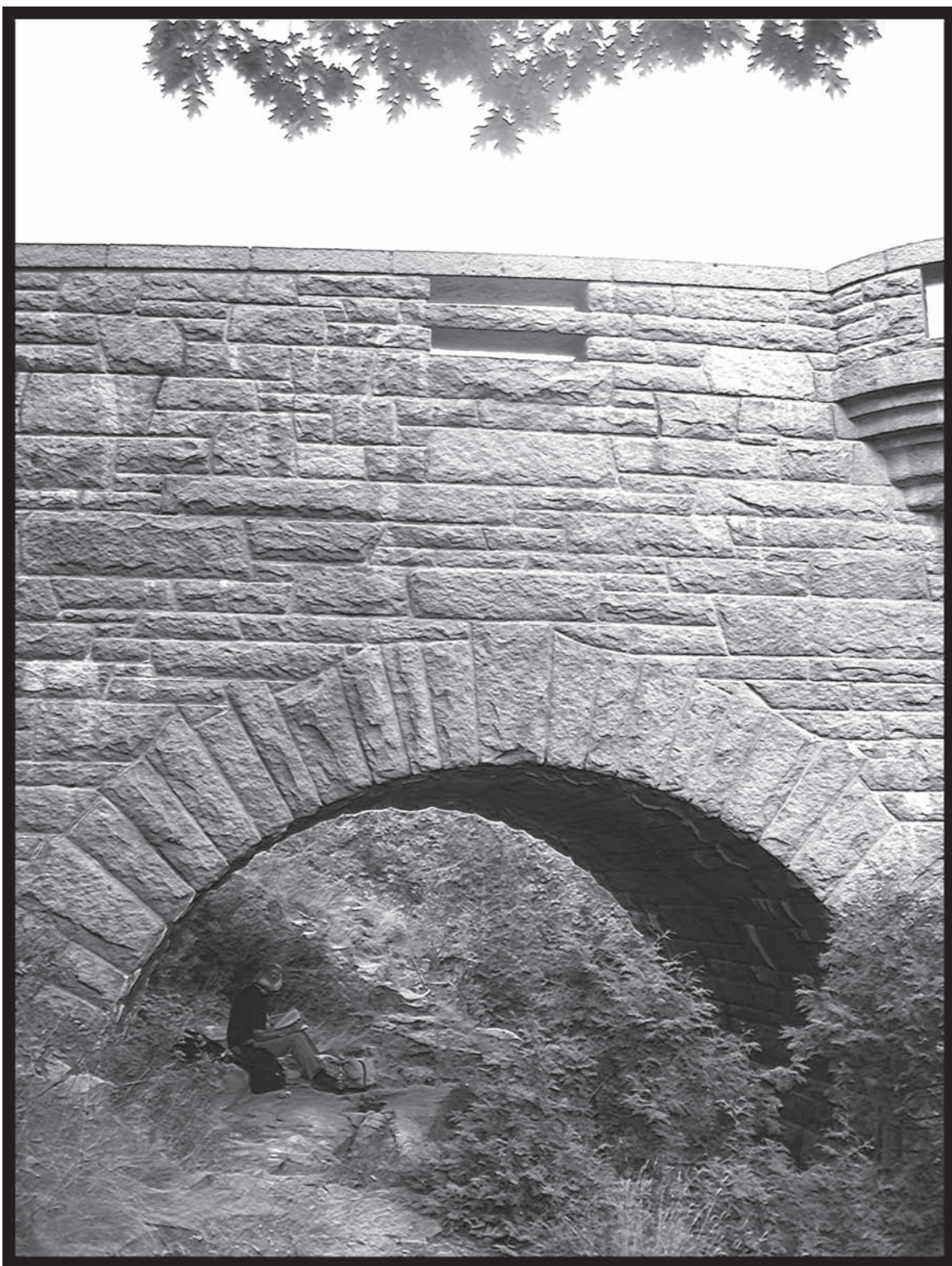
"Your family?"

She led his hand between her legs, "feel there, feel it, how wet am I?"

"Very wet."

"Are you going to tell me no?"

Before he passed out she was leading him to the cabin's bed. Made him finish undressing her, & had his rags off in a couple of good tugs. He didn't have to know how with her, she twisted



with him close & kissed him deeply as he slid into her, as she guided him in, as they moved with each other deeper & slower, slower, until not so slow, & faster, & harder, & deeper, & her moans so low in her throat, pulling him in, pulling him harder in, did I wear a condom, is it on? Yes, I feel it, how did it get on? *Ohhhh godddd* she made us cum together, I don't know how but I feel that power of us as one—

Jazz shakes me. “Keep going.”

“She moved. And she was gone. And she had told me that was how it was going to happen.”

“But?”

“Nothing. She was gone. And for a whole school year I had only been with her. I was alone.”

“So you joined the football team?”

“Yah. It wasn't a very good team. I showed up, I was big & willing.”

Jazz nods. Smiles. She's listening like Rosie would. I *hate* remembering her.

“It wasn't anything special, we played hard, we shared girlfriends, we drank a lot. At some point the six of us knew.”

“About the dreams?”

“About how they weren't dreams, Jazz.”

They say it's all about getting your ass examined. That's stupid.

“They were from somewhere far away. Their planet had died or something. They were in our dreams, but these were real somehow. This is how they traveled. They were trying to figure out if our world would work for them.”

“I don't understand, Toby.”

“They wanted to know whether they should come here.”

“Now? Like land?”

Toby's look is anguished, frustrated. “They don't relate to time like us, like we do, like it's a single straight line through things.”

“What then?”

Like they had no leashes on them like we do. Double, triple, sideways, forward, backwards.

I tried to talk to them. They weren't hurting my body, but I did feel a great pressure in my head.

“Please explain to me. You're eternal?”

“Yes. In your words.”

“But your world is gone.”

“Yes. We killed it.”

“So you want to come to our planet now?”

“Now?”

“Yes? Now?”

“No. Then?”

“Then?”

“Then? Yes. We travel like a field in the sun.”

"We found out we could keep them away by drinking really heavy, Jazz. We couldn't not sleep. But we could drink till we passed out & be too gone for them."

Jazz nods.

"Other things. Passing out from violent sex."

"Violent. Or rape?"

Toby shrugs. "There's enough girls like it rough. We shared."

"But then Ash & me?"

"That was me. I fell for her."

Jazz laughs, relaxes again. "A lot of guys did. She couldn't help herself."

"She didn't try."

"No."

"So," Jazz summarizes, "you six were going to rape Ash & me so that the aliens in your dreams would stay back?"

"Yah, you two & gallons of Scotch."

"Bu the crash?"

"We'd never seen them while altogether, or in waking!"

We drove off the road, flipped. The rest ran. I didn't. You two were still out. I checked you over. You were OK.

"I ran."

That night, they have separate rooms. To compromise, Toby lets Jazz suck his cock in the bathroom they share. She is slow, she slurps, she moans her pleasure, she swallows & swallows. Stands, straightens her frock, cries a little, leaves.

Um. Yah. Save the last bit.

Toby crawls to his bed & sleeps better than he has since Rosie's arms so long ago.

xxiii.

"Tell me how this fits, Beckah."

She smiles, nods.

"I'm in a movie theatre to see a movie called *Fun*, a sort of alien invasion movie, but nobody seems to mind how it extends beyond the theater, & I find myself in the movie, climbing rocks, look down to a settlement, & hurry down to warn them of the invasion.

I pause. "But then the people in the theatre are gossiping & not paying attention. I yell, 'Quiet!' They look at me & say 'this movie is so bad!' & I say 'I paid good money for it & I want to see it!'

"But tho I can make them quiet down, I can't make them understand this movie is *real*, it's outside & all around them. I keep hurrying out of the theatre to warn & back to my seat to

watch.”

Rebecca smiles. Waiting though sly.

“Finally, it all makes sense to others. They get that we’ve been invaded & the world is destroyed in many places. The rest a lot of prison camps.”

“Not everywhere though.”

“No. Some places people have collected & learned how to repel the attacks. It’s by using music. Music cripples them, to a degree. So people collect LPs, the only kind that can be played without electricity. CDs can’t, the rest can’t.

“There are dance parties in these liberated cities, they go on night after night, weeks, months, more records are gathered. People are sent from city to city, with records, with portable turntables.”

Rebecca laughs.

“But there are more talkers in the theatre, & I have to argue with them & it delays me from my duties. There’s panic at the settlement & a group flees to a spacebus which flies away, but the aliens use powerful lasers to shoot it down.”

“Are they killed?”

“No. They float down from the sky to the dancefloor below, & begin to dance like it’s a choreographed Broadway show.”

No she’s laughing even more.

“Then something & something else & the movie’s over, just a purple-tinted nebulae on the screen.”

“Wow.”

“And I go outside to the wreckage of the dancefloors in the Woods, every hundred feet or so, & I find my notebooks & my green windbreaker jacket. I look at someone else & say, ‘wow, lucky’ & get on the elevator & get off at the lobby & walk away—”

She kisses me now. Pleased, despite herself, my question. “Just because.”

I nod. Glad she still likes to kiss me. “But how does this fit?”

“Fit?”

“Yes, how does it fit here?”

“Into *Labyrinthine*?”

“Yes.”

“Does anything not fit, Raymond?”

I lean forward into this notebook, watch this pen forming letter after letter, word after word, on down this page.

“It fits because I say so?”

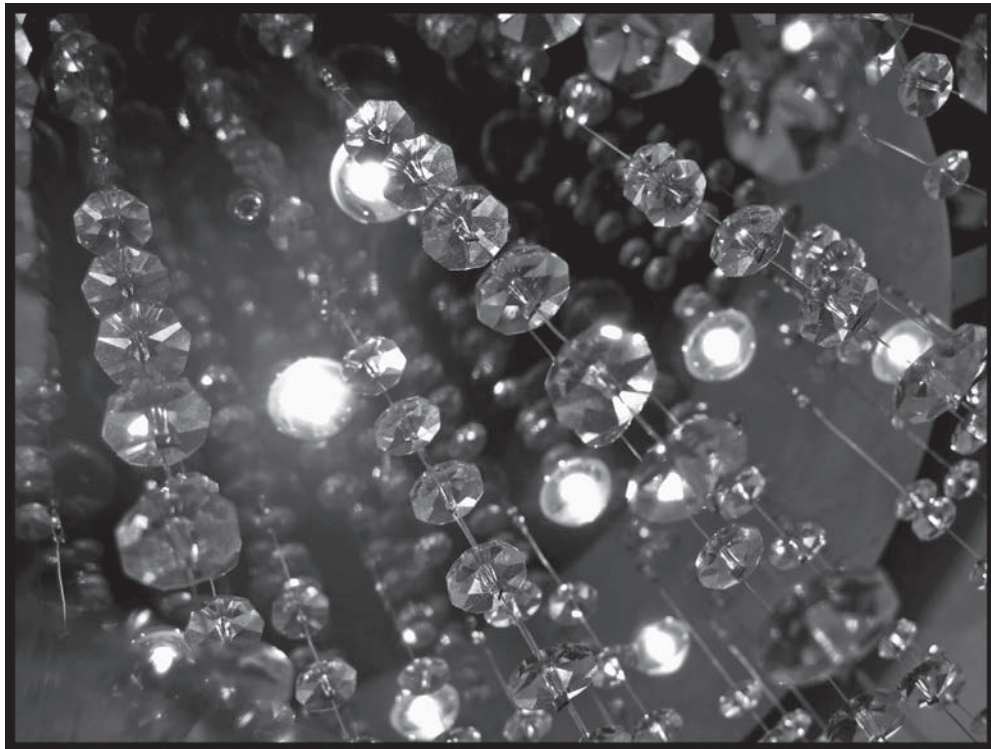
“It fits or you *wouldn't* say so.”
 I nod. “It matters too much.”
 “Yes.” Glint to speak more.
 “And?”
 “You’re funny despite yourself.”
 I nod thanks.

How does it fit? Perhaps it’s the movie that shows after the midnight shows of **RemoteLand**—goes on about 4 or 5 AM when even fewer remain & who would think something important might happen?

But Self & Ralph & the girl that possesses them know. And they watch. And they wonder how much of it is real? Should they go outside? It’s been a long while. What will they find?



To be continued in Cenacle | 92 | April 2015



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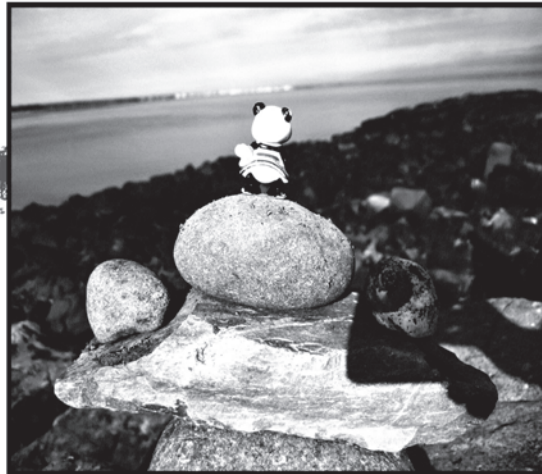
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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. This issue concludes the serialization of his excellent short book, *Paleo Redemption*. A postscript he reports to the tale is that “the Museum and points elsewhere are all a-buzz about ‘Uncle Charlie’s Bone-Bed.’ Guess Ted didn’t get much traction putting his name on it.” More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His seriocomic poetry appears regularly in these pages. Looking toward a RaiBook volume of his work in 2015.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, & died in 1940 in Hollywood, California. He is most famously known for his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*. His wonderful story reprinted in this issue is also reprinted in the 2003 Burning Man Books series: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. When not writing her amazing little ‘ku, she is a teacher, a musician, a maker of puppets, & a delightful human being. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams> and <http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows.html#DJJudih>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. Chapters from his epic travel memoir, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in these pages. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows.html#DJToanke>.

John D. Marks is the founder & former President of Search for Common Ground, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., that focuses on international conflict management programming.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His rock-solid visionary poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. And, as we found out at the 11/1/2014 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, his son Jamie plays a mean guitar.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. One of the finest, funniest, & most gifted people I know.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. A recent trip back to my origins reminds me of how grateful I am to live in metro-Boston.



Commit to what you have.

Commit to what you do.

Commit to what you are.

